THE "PAOLO ORSI" ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

Guide

Electa

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MINISTERO DELLA CULTURA

The "Paolo Orsi" Regional Archaeological Museum of Syracuse

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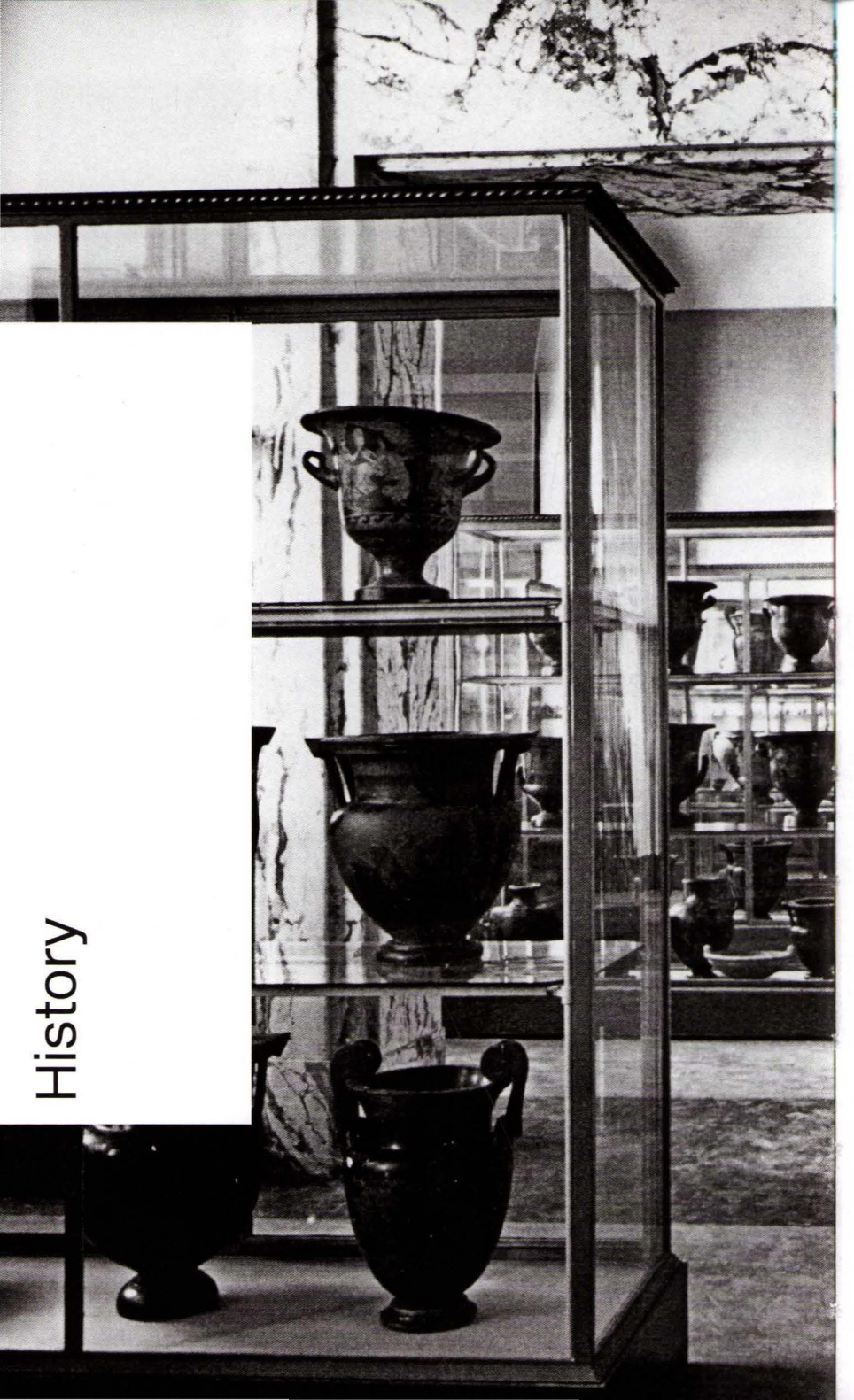

History

The history of the National Museum of Syracuse and its collections

The Archaeological Museum of Syracuse was opened to the public on 11 April 1886, in the very heart of Ortygia, in Piazza Duomo. While the building work was still under way, in 1878, a regal decree (issued by King Umberto I) declared it to be a National Museum.

This Museum became the new home of the collection of antiquities that originally dated to the end of the 18th century, and that was housed in the archiepiscopal seminary and later displayed in the Civic Museum. The Civic Museum was established in 1811 to give a suitable home to the famous statue of Venus Anadyomene – discovered in Syracuse in 1804 by the archaeologist Saverio Landolina, the Regal Custodian of Antiquities from Val Demone and Val di Noto. A later addition was the Sarcophagus of Adelphia, found in 1872 in the catacombs of San Giovanni by Francesco Saverio Cavallari (1809-1896). Appointed Director of Sicilian Antiquities, Cavallari was the first director of the new National Archaeological Museum.

The building, designed by Luigi Mauceri, was erected in Piazza Duomo on the site of the previous Fatebenefratelli convent and hospital, which originally dated to 1591, and which were closed in 1868. Five rooms were opened to the public. These now housed the epigraphic finds and Christian sculpture from the catacombs, the statues, Greco-Roman fragments, the Tribune of Venus, and finally ceramic finds, in that order.

On his arrival in Syracuse from Rovereto in 1888, Paolo Orsi (1859-1935) inherited from his predecessor the far from easy task of rearranging the museum's collections, which were already extensive. At the same time, the research he carried out in the 40 years he spent in Sicily led to an extraordinary increase in ancient artefacts. The displays were reorganized, paying great attention to documenting the sequence of the island's prehistoric cultures, the colonial cities, and their contacts with their Greek homeland and the wider Mediterranean.

On his death, after a brief period under Giuseppe Cultrera (1877-1968), the huge work of reordering and restoring the finds was continued by Luigi Bernabò Brea (1910-1999). After the war, Brea lost no time in reopening the museum – partially in 1947, and then fully in 1949 – giving the displays a wholly innovative design. But the huge amount of material that came to light towards the end of the 1950s in the excavation campaigns conducted by Bernabò Brea himself, in the eastern part of Sicily, highlighted once again the need to find a new site in order to house the collections.

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1-2. Rooms and displays in the National Museum, Piazza Duomo

Paolo Orsi

Born in Rovereto on 17 October 1859, Paolo Orsi was the greatest and most innovative archaeologist in Sicily between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. A meticulous man, with a positivist education, and obsessed by work and research, after spending an initial period of training in his native city, he undertook his university studies in Vienna and Padua, where he graduated in Humanities.

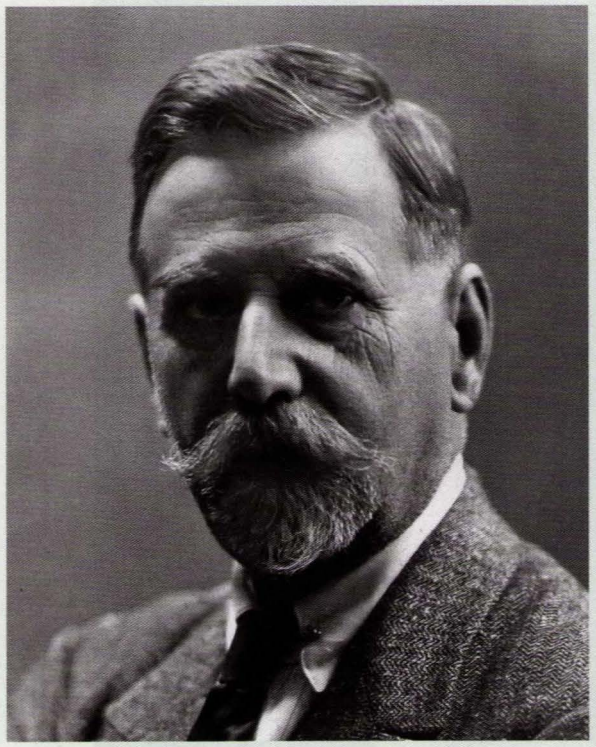
In Rome he consolidated his knowledge of archaeology, and took an interest in the earliest periods of human history, after following the lectures of Luigi Pigorini, the founder of prehistoric archaeology in Italy. A luminary who was worshipped by very many young scholars, including Orsi, Pigorini immediately glimpsed the talent and potential of this young man from Rovereto. He personally facilitated his career in the public administration: first in Florence as a library assistant, and later in Syracuse as an inspector of monuments, a role which Orsi initally accepted somewhat reluctantly, after a failed attempt to win a similar post at the National Museum of Prehistory in Rome, but in the hope that he might return to the capital under his mentor's wing.

The date was 7 September 1888, and from that moment on Orsi would only leave Sicily for short periods at a time, to oversee excavations in Calabria, to direct the museum in Naples, and to return to his beloved Rovereto in the stifling weeks of the hot Sicilian summers. He later left Sicily once and for all, forced into retirement from administration, on 13 August 1934, after a short and difficult period spent alongside Giuseppe Cultrera, his successor. Right from the start the Doge of Sicilian archaeology, as his friend Antonio Taramelli, an expert in numismatics and epigraphy, was fond of calling him, Orsi worked under Francesco Saverio Cavallari, and devoted himself to research and archaeological investigations.

At first, his new workplace, Syracuse, was not to his liking – it was "totally devoid of any library resources, and with a director [...] who has little to teach, because he is not an archaeologist" – and it was somewhat removed from his own field of study, which combined the humanities with the rigours of science. However, after an unsuccessful application in 1889 to be awarded the Chair of Archaeology and Ancient Art History in Rome, he embarked upon the first of his very many explorations in the virgin territory of Syracuse, and Sicily.

He began to observe and explore, undertaking "lengthy and uncomfortable excursions to impenetrable places". In the space of a few short years, in 1892 he drew up the first classification of Sicilian prehistory, which was completed in 1896 with a subdivision into four periods in Sicily, preceded by the Neolithic Stentinello culture. These were the years of explorations and systematic publications of the most important prehistoric sites in eastern Sicily (Stentinello, Castelluccio, Thapsos, Plemmirio, Melilli, Cozzo Pantano, Pantalica, Cassibile, Finocchito, Banco Grande, and Monte Tabuto). Thanks to research on necropolises, and a comparison of grave goods, types of burial, and data on the natural environment and anthropological findings, this work made it possible to contextualize the local civilization from its origins until the 5th century BC, until the sudden arrival of Greek civilization, and the final manifestations of Native (indigenous) societies.

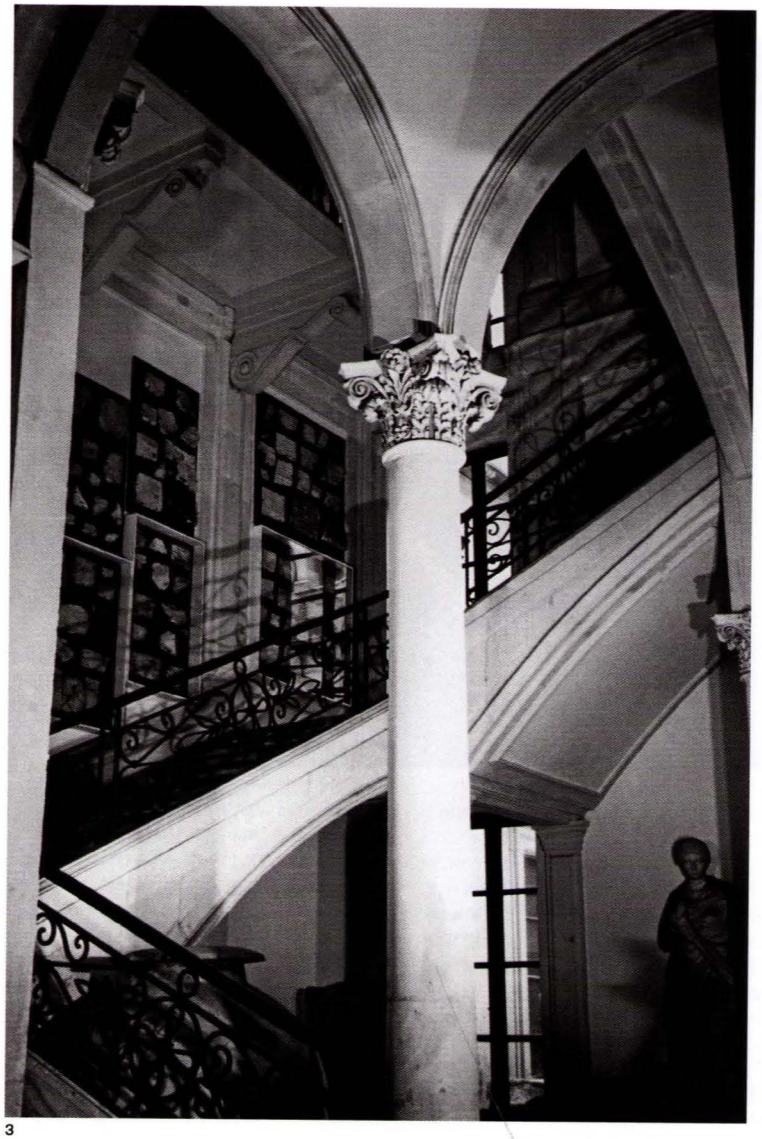
Equally important were his studies on all aspects of colonial Greek society, thanks to excavations in Syracuse itself, as well as in Agrigento, Lentini,



Megara Hyblaea, Gela and Kamarina, and at sites in the hinterland of Syracuse, Akrai and Eloro. However, research on Roman and medieval phases was not overlooked, either. As the official in charge of protecting the Calabrian area, he conducted highly important excavations: these included Locri, Caulonia, Hipponion and Medma, to name just a few.

Appointed Senator of the Kingdom of Italy in 1924, he combined his political activities, taking steps for the conservation and consolidation of the historical and artistic heritage of Sicily and Calabria, with archaeological research, with the support of his collaborators: the architect Sebastiano Agati, Rosario Carta, a draughtsman, and Giuseppe D'Amico, a restorer. The wealth of finds resulting from his excavations enriched the National Museum of Syracuse's collections with new museum displays, and drew up an expansion plan that would later be continued by his successor, Giuseppe Cultrera, and then completed by Luigi Bernabò Brea.

He died in Rovereto on 8 November 1935, with nostalgia and longing for his beloved Sicily. His vast body of scientific work, and his many different interests and personal qualities, are reflected in the Syracuse museum, which today is named after him, and in the archive of documents he left behind, his famous notebooks and correspondence. These are a testament to the rigour, methodology and philanthropic spirit of the father of Sicilian archaeology.



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3. Stairs of National Museum in Piazza Duomo: on the walls is the epigraphy collection

pages 12-13

4. The "casino" and fountain in grounds of Villa Landolina

Villa Landolina

After failed attempts to expand the existing building, and to purchase an adjacent building, a solution was found by purchasing, from the public demesne, a large area of extraordinary interest as regards archaeology and the local landscape: the grounds of Villa Landolina, where there are remains from antiquity, such as parts of an archaic Greek necropolis, and pagan and Christian underground burial areas. Here a modern building could be erected for museum displays.

The short distance from the archaeological park of Neapolis, with the city's most important Hellenistic and Roman monuments, the proximity of the major Christian catacomb complexes, those of San Giovanni and Vigna Cassia, and the fact that the huge archaeological area of Piazza della Vittoria was nearby, played a significant role in choosing the location of the new Institute.

On 16 January 1988 the Archaeological Museum of Syracuse was moved from its old building in Piazza del Duomo, and renamed after the archaeologist Paolo Orsi. It was inaugurated in its new home, in the attractive setting of the grounds of Villa Landolina.

Minissi's museum and the modern layout

Construction work on the modern building began in 1967, to a design worked on by two architects: Vincenzo Cabianca and, especially, Franco Minissi. It was set in the most low-lying section of the grounds. This was so as to spare the area where trees grew, alongside the avenue leading to the 18th century villa, where some of the Museum's offices are now situated. The building extends horizontally on two floors, plus a lower ground floor. It has a distinct, triangular structure, and is divided into three separate units. These are connected by a circular corridor, and arranged around a central space, which on the lower ground floor features the large auditorium, while on the first floor it corresponds to the space reserved for temporary exhibitions.

The Museum houses over 27,000 individual finds, illustrating clearly and in detail the most important moments in the history of the whole of Sicily, and the civilizations that have come and gone on the island, from prehistoric times to the Paleochristian era, making this museum one of the most important museum complexes in Europe.

One of the great virtues of the Regional Archaeological Museum of Syracuse is the rigorous criterion adopted for displaying its finds, whereby it pays special attention to the context in which they were found, and the exact chronological sequence. The building's unique design, consisting of a series of hexagons each joined to the next, allows visitors to trace the various stages in the history of the Sicilian territory, and especially the history of ancient Syracuse, without coming across any kind of obstacles or interruptions. Visitors are also accompanied and guided by a rich variety of background information provided by multimedia displays, information panels, aerial and satellite photos, scale models and reconstructions.

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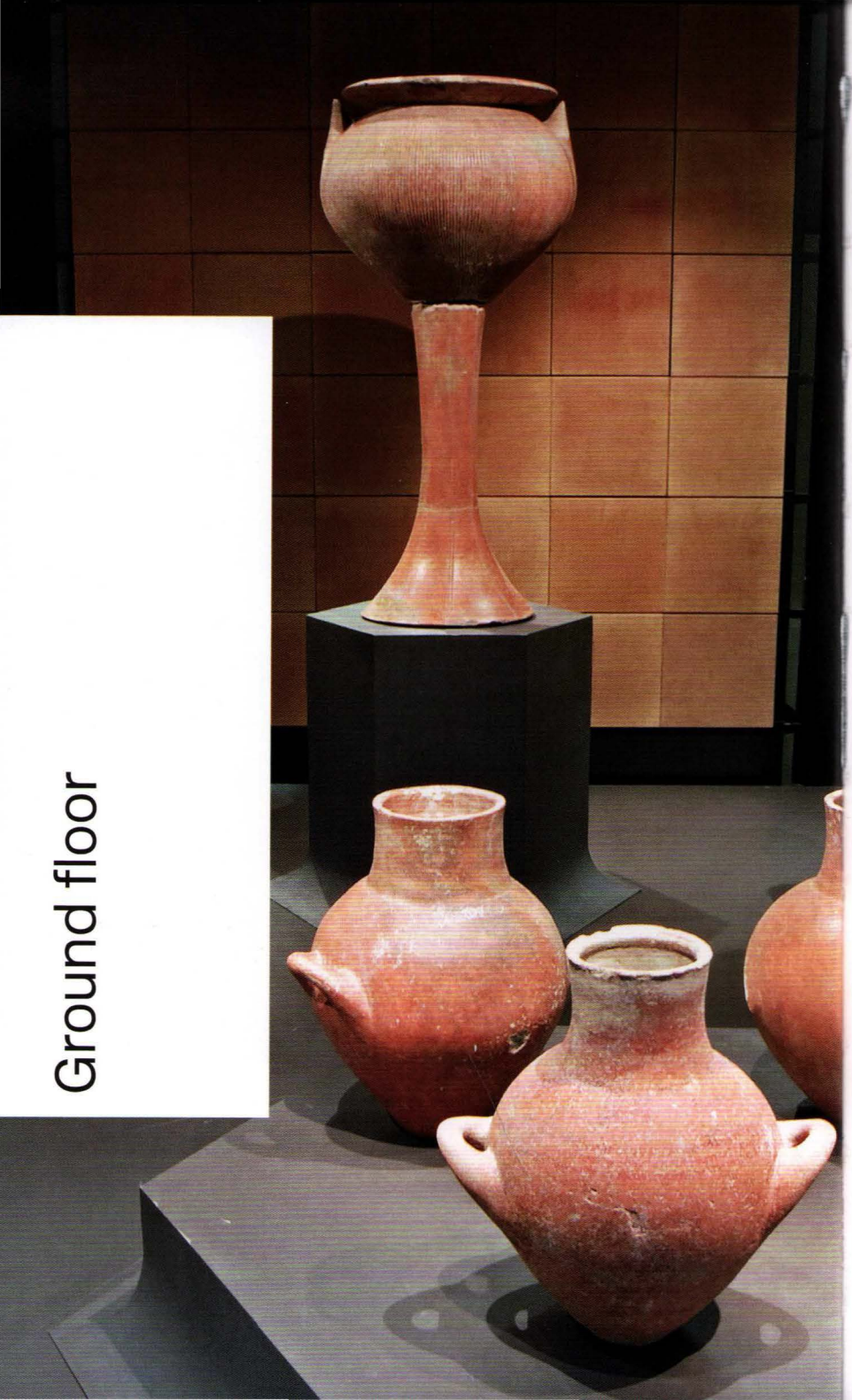
5. The so-called Il Fusco corridor in the new Museum



Ground floor

Sector A

GEOLOGICAL AND PALEONTOLOGICAL SECTION. FROM THE NEOLITHIC STENTINELLO CULTURE TO THE PROTOHISTORICAL VILLASMUNDO NECROPOLIS

This section, dedicated to the prehistory and protohistory of central and eastern Sicily, takes visitors on a journey through millennia of history, as they come into contact with the material culture, environment and society of the ancient peoples who lived in Sicily before the arrival of the Greeks.

The exploration begins with a section covering the geological history of Sicily and its continual tectonic changes, ever since the island first appeared as a patchwork of disparate lands that emerged from the seabed, up until the arrival of the first groups of humans, during the Lower Paleolithic.

In the display cases, the rocks most commonly found in the Hyblaean region, and some of the most significant fossils, have been displayed with precise references to the geological map, allowing visitors to place them in their proper context.

There are also descriptions of the Quaternary fauna of Sicily, which featured the evolutionary phenomena of gigantism and dwarfism. On display are casts of two dwarf elephants, as well as lithic material from the Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods.

The history of the earliest communities, significant traces of which remain in the stone tools left inside natural caves, will allow us to understand more about the arrival of the first groups of humans. These introduced agriculture during the Neolithic period (Stentinello Culture, 5th-4th millennium BC), when the relationship between man and nature changed radically, with the creation of the earliest defensive villages, and the use of pottery. From plain (ie unslipped) pottery, but with sophisticated carved and impressed decorations, to painted pottery, recorded at several sites in Sicily, it is possible to follow the evolution of pottery wares up until the beginning of the Chalcolithic (Copper age), which – thanks to several finds – is also subdivided into several phases (end of 4th-end of 3rd millennium BC).

The Early Bronze Age (end of 3rd to mid-2nd millennium BC), with the Castelluccio Culture, named after the site of Castelluccio, has yielded some of the most fascinating finds of the island's prehistory. These have come both from tombs, located at several sites in Sicily, and from the village itself.

The Middle Bronze Age (15th century BC to mid-8th century BC), during which the island's inhabitants lived mainly in coastal areas, takes its name from the site of Thapsos, where the tombs – with rich grave goods produced both locally and imported from Mycenae and Cyprus – document relations with the Mycenean world and with locations on the other side of the Mediterranean.

The Pantalica Culture (Late Bronze Age and Iron Age), with its necropolises, allows us to trace the development of both pottery and bronzework up until approximately the middle of the 7th century BC. It is recorded at several sites, including the necropolis of Cassibile (11th to 9th centuries BC): many aspects of this phase are connected to the unresolved historical problems concerning the arrival of the Siculi, and enhance what we know from reading written sources in the light of archaeological documentation.

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6. Skeletons of two dwarf elephants from Grotta Spinagallo

7. Open bowl, from Megara Hyblaea

A special place is set aside for bronze hoards, from the 10th to 7th centuries BC. These are evidence of the custom of accumulating bronze objects as a precursor of currency.

The sector ends with a presentation of the finds from the Valle del Marcellino, which document its precolonial relations with many different parts of the Mediterranean, while the section ends with material remains from Sant'Angelo Muxaro and Polizello, testifying also to the peculiar aspects of the western part of the island, Sikania.

The two skeletons of **dwarf elephants** (fig. 6) on the raised platform in the centre of the room dedicated to fauna, and to the earliest evidence of human presence on the island, belong to a particular species of land-based vertebrates, from Grotta Spinagallo, a male and a female. The female can be distinguished by the absence of tusks, which is typical of this species.

During the Quaternary period, the alternation of warm and cold phases led to a series of migrations by both marine and land-based organisms. During phases when the sea level was lower, continental fauna crossed the Strait of Messina and arrived on the island in several different migratory waves, which alternated with occasional extinctions. When the sea level rose again, these species became isolated, and they were forced to adapt to a great extent. This would later also give rise to the appearance of some entirely new species.

The most significant variations are seen in the size of some species. Large animals became smaller, sometimes spectacularly smaller, as in the case of elephants. Around 500,000 years ago Sicily was populated by a pygmy species, *Elephas falconeri*, adult members of which were the size of a large dog. It probably became extinct between 350,000 and 300,000 years ago.

The Neolithic village of Megara Hyblaea is one of the coastal sites surrounded by a ditch that are found along the coast of Syracuse, such as Stentinello, Matrensa and Ognina. The function of the ditch, which bordered the settlement, is not yet certain. It may have been dug for defensive purposes, or to serve as a drainage ditch, or for channelling water.

The **open bowl** (fig. 7), decorated on the outside with a series of red bands with a flame motif edged in black, was found in 1917, together with pottery sherds having similar decoration, inside the ditch that surrounded the Neolithic village, in an area where a temple was built in the Greek era.

It is of sophisticated workmanship, and is an example of three-colour painted wares, which were common in southern Italy starting in the Middle Neolithic (*c.* 5200-4300 BC), and which is associated in Sicily with Stentinello-style impressed pottery.

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Grotta Chiusazza, a karstic cavity near Canicattini Bagni (near Syracuse), explored in the 1950s, has revealed overlapping archaeological levels dating from the Late Neolithic to the Middle Bronze Age, with traces of a human presence in the Final Bronze Age and in the Greek era. This stratigraphic sequence has formed the main framework for the succession of Sicily's prehistoric phases.

In the 1990s, in the village of Castelluccio (near Noto), the most important Early Bronze Age site in eastern Sicily (end of 3rd-early 2nd millennium BC), the **dwelling known as hut 2** was excavated. The vases shown here (fig. 8) come from this structure.

The cave was used as a dwelling, or seasonal shelter, by groups linked to animal herding. However, they also had prestige goods, such as a small dagger made of copper, a metal rarely found in cultures of the period. The cave has yielded **two-handled pots** (fig. 9), which are chronologically contemporary (San Cono-Piano Notaro Style, and the del Conzo Style, around 3800-3500 BC). These display similar decoration, namely incision and painting, on the same vase form, although it was produced using different techniques. Their shape and decorative motif identify them as examples of Early Eneolithic pottery ware in the Syracuse area.

The hut has an approximately quadrangular plan, and had a raised bench, probably used for storing both tools and the vases themselves.

Inside there were a number of concentrations of broken pots on the original beaten-earth floor; in particular a set of drinking vessels consisting of several stemmed cups, an amphora and beakers, decorated with complex geometric motifs, typical of the Castelluccio style. Especially interesting are the motifs painted on the outer walls of some stemmed cups, which seem intended to reproduce a stylized version of eyes and eyelashes, a motif also found in the decoration of the bossed bone plaques.

Originally positioned in the south part of the hut were the two large, multi-handled ribbed *pithoi*, with a round hole just above the base. The decoration of the pottery is particularly fine when contrasted with the scant repertoire of decorations present in pottery from the necropolis.

8. Large vases with incised and painted decoration, from Grotta Chiusazza

9. Vases from hut 2 at village of Castelluccio (Noto)

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10. Large tomb entrance slabs from the Castelluccio necropolis (Noto), with slab from tomb 31 on the left

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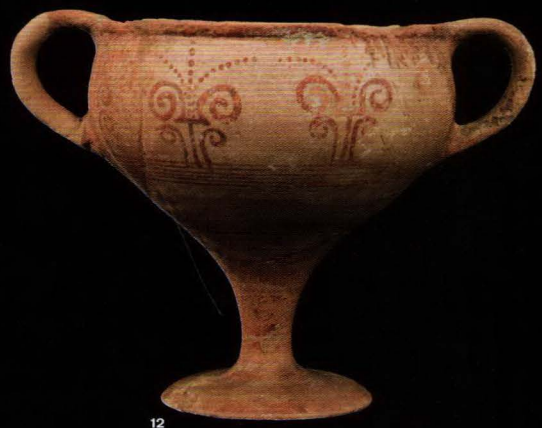

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11. Large handle platelet with incised decoration, from one of the large bowls on high stands from Thapsos

12. Mycenean cup from Cozzo Pantano

The Castelluccio necropolis has brought to light highly interesting examples of **entrance slabs** (fig. 10) used to seal artificial rock-cut chamber tombs. Tomb 31, dated to the final phase of the Early Bronze Age-Middle Bronze Age, was preceded by an access porch. Its internal section was sealed by two limestone slabs. The front of the second of these, which sealed off the actual burial itself, was decorated in low relief, in accordance with a technique, and with decorative motifs, that were completely new in Sicilian prehistory. Inside, the tomb contained 17 individuals arranged along the walls in a curled-up position. The grave goods were not particularly valuable, in contrast to the complexity of the decorative motif carved on the door-slab. Also found were pottery vessels, some decorated with motifs typical of the so-called Thapsos style, as well as a few flint blades, a spindle-whorl, fragments of copper objects, and a pendant/amulet made from a boar's tusk.

The decorative motif on the tomb-slab, two spirals side-by-side at the top, with an element in the shape of a pair of scissors attached to their lower sections, has been interpreted in various different ways. Paolo Orsi, who discovered the burial, likened the spiral motif to similar decorations present in Mycenean art. More recently, Luigi Bernabò Brea saw the image not as a kind of decoration, but as symbolic. He believed that the craftspeople of Castelluccio wanted to represent a stylized form of the sexual act by means of this motif, in other words the moment of birth, as the opposite of death, associated with the burial chamber. This would have expressed a religious ideology based on the centrality of fertility, in an Early Bronze Age society that was very closely linked to natural resources.

Regardless of these differing interpretations, and their symbolic value, the tomb-slabs from Castelluccio are exceptional evidence of the skill of Early Bronze Age craftspeople, and represent one of the few examples of sculptural art in the island's prehistory.

The bowls on high stands, with forked, flat "platelet" handles, are representative of a pottery type that was very widespread in the Sicilian Middle Bronze Age. They have been found both inside tombs, often in the middle of the burial chamber associated with cups or amphoras, and at settlement sites. Owing to their exceptional size and the characteristics of the platelet, which is probably meant to represent a stylized female body, this pottery type is believed to be linked to religious ceremonies. The figurative motif shown on the platelet, the **symmetrical, facing waterfowl** (fig. 11), is attested only on pottery found at Thapsos: this comes from the settlement area, and dates to around 1450-1200 BC.

Owing to the characteristics of the dwellings at Thapsos, and the numerous objects imported from the Aegean, Malta and Cyprus, the site can be regarded as a meeting-point and trading-place for products along a route that linked the eastern Mediterranean to coastal areas in the west.

This **Mycenean cup** (Late Helladic III A2, *c.* 1390-1330 BC) (fig. 12) is of a type rarely found in the repertoire of imported pottery forms found in Sicily. However, it has specific parallels, in terms of its type and decoration, with pottery from the same period found in the Aegean. It was part of the grave goods in a rock-cut chamber tomb found by Paolo Orsi in the Cozzo Pantano area, a small rocky hill a few kilometres south-west of Syracuse. A necropolis was identified there consisting of 60 chamber tombs, sometimes with a *tholos* (vaulted "beehive") ceiling. The Cozzo Pantano

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13. Group of pots from Pantalica necropolis

14. Objects from the grave goods of a female burial, Pantalica necropolis

necropolis has yielded other imported materials, bronze swords and Maltese pottery, both real and imitation (Borg in-Nadur phase), especially large bowls on stands, other bowls, and jars.

Pantalica, a natural fortress that looms above the impenetrable canyons of the Abapo, with very steep cliffs, stands on a mountain spur connected to the plateau behind by a narrow ridge (Sella di Filiporto). It is famous for its extensive necropolis of around 5,000 chamber tombs dug into the vertical face of the rock, which are sometimes inaccessible. Explored by Paolo Orsi, they relate to several different phases of human presence at the site.

Tomb 38, situated in the north-west part of the necropolis, had several individual chambers leading off from a wide access corridor, in line with a type that represented only a minority of tombs. It is likely that it was intended for a group of people linked by kinship.

Full of pottery vessels when it was found by a group of tomb-robbers in 1880, it yielded the most important **pottery group** (fig. 13, fig. p. 16) found at Pantalica: dominant among these is the colossal pot on a high stand, a type replicated in a miniature version. The grave goods are completed by a large pottery set of amphoras and small dishes. All the pottery, which is wheel-made, is painted in a coral-red slip, polished, and sometimes decorated with vertical incisions.

The **grave goods** (fig. 14) placed inside a small square-entrance tomb in the north zone of the Pantalica necropolis contained just one burial, that of a young woman, accompanied by a number of pots, a small jug, and a pot on a high stand, painted in a shiny red slip, in keeping with a ceramic taste that was typical of the first phase of use of the Pantalica necropolis (Recent Bronze Age, 1250-1000 BC).

A round bronze mirror was placed at the feet of the young woman, as well as a violin-bow fibula (brooch), with incised decoration. Also found were small gold beads, fragments of an incised gold sheet, a bracelet, and a silver ring. The objects made of precious metals placed in this tomb are all indicators that the deceased woman had an elite role, and a position of prestige in the community. The young "princess" from tomb 37 must certainly have belonged to the dominant group of local inhabitants that controlled Pantalica's dealings with groups living overseas.

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15. Bronze greaves from Madonna del Piano necropolis

One set of grave goods from the site of Madonna del Piano (near Catania), is associated with the burial, in an urn, of a male. Near the urn there was a small pouring vessel with a filter. The grave goods included a set of defensive and offensive weapons: **two greaves** (fig. 15), a sword with the remains of its sheath, and a dagger and a spearhead. Numerous small bronze studs, still with strands of woven textile fibres, must have been sewn onto what was probably a cuirass made of perishable material. The greaves, which were designed to be laced up, must have been worn over a leather lining; they are the only examples of their kind found at the Madonna del Piano necropolis, and in all of Sicily, but close parallels are found in Campania and Calabria, at the Torre Galli and Castellace necropolises at Oppido Mamertino.

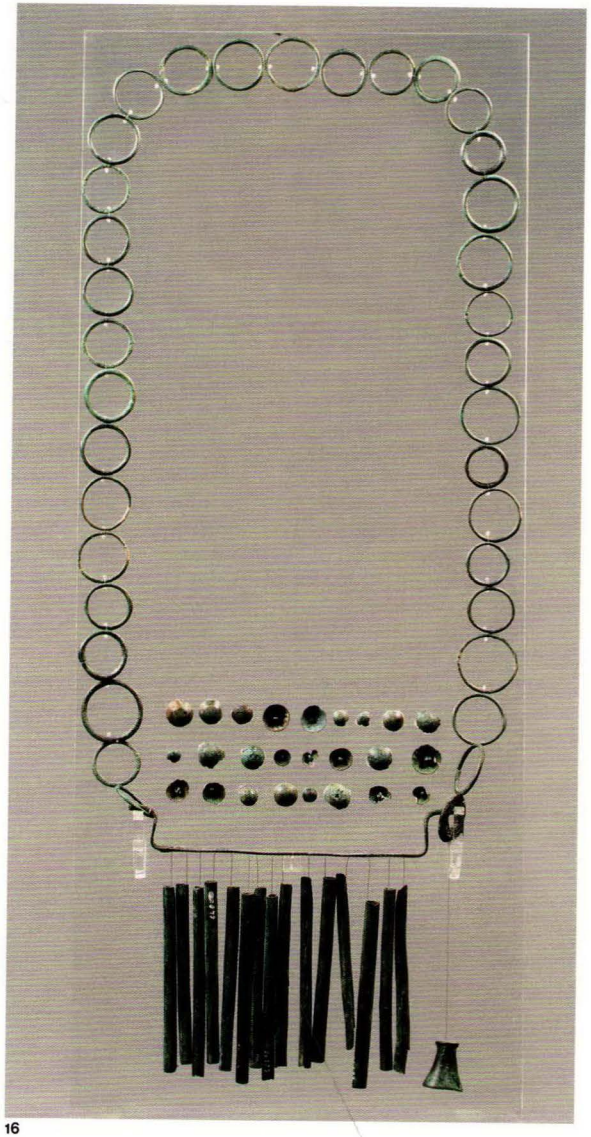
Given the ancient date of this burial (Final Bronze Age, 11th century BC), one of the oldest in the necropolis, it has been suggested that the deceased belonged to the original group of immigrants who first founded the site.

Also from the Madonna del Piano site, from the grave goods of a Final Bronze Age tomb (10th century BC), is a **"tintinnabulum" breastplate** (fig. 16). This consists of a chain of rings of varying sizes, joined to a perforated horizontal plate with attached elements in the shape of birds' heads, from which hang hollow tubes made of thin bronze sheets. A small conical bell was originally fastened to the first ring in the chain.

Bronze studs with an internal ring must have been placed above the plaque, and stitched onto the deceased's clothing. Interpreted as a musical instrument, it was probably worn over the chest, and would jingle every time the person wearing it moved. It was placed in a *pithos* burial.

As well as the tintinnabulum, the grave goods also consisted in a series of personal ornaments, and a number of tools linked to household work associated with women, such as spinning thread. This reflects the role of women in society in the period, a role traditionally associated with spinning and weaving, which determined their function in the organization of labour, and in the economy of the individual household, and of the village itself.

The Marcellino necropolis at Villasmundo (second half of 8th century BC) documents a period, immediately before the Greek colonization, during which the Mediterranean was plied by merchants bringing valuable goods from northern Syria to Euboea (Greece), and as far as the central Mediterranean and Italy's Tyrrhenian seaboard.



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16. Tintinnabulum breastplate from Madonna del Piano necropolis

17. Vessels called "pilgrim flasks" from Marcellino protohistoric necropolis

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18. Fragment of bronze belt from the Adrano hoard

The **"pilgrim" flasks** (fig. 17) are examples of a new type of pottery vessel, and were designed to contain liquids, to be transported in a suspended position. They were among the objects that travellers, or people who found themselves journeying far from their homes, used to carry with them for a variety of purposes. Found at several spots along the Mediterranean coast, it seems that this vessel type originated in the Levant and the Cyprus area in the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, where the earliest types are recorded. In Sicily few examples are known, and most of these were found in the tombs dug along the river Marcellino quarry site.

The Mendolito hoard, from Adrano (near Catania), with a total weight of around 900 kg, is the largest hoard in Sicily. Found in 1908 in a large ceramic receptacle in the north-west area of the Native city of Adrano, and purchased for the Archaeological Museum of Syracuse by Paolo Orsi in several lots between 1908 and 1912, it is composed of objects of various sorts, both intact and fragmentary, datable to between the end of the 8th and the first half of the 7th centuries BC. The large amount of material, surely associated with a foundry, leads to a belief that it probably belonged to the treasure of a sanctuary, or at any rate to a public deposit, rather than a private one.

As well as offensive weapons, items of personal adornment and clothing accessories, tools and utensils, also present are **embossed metal plates that were parts of belts**. An example of these is the one displayed here (fig. 18), showing a stylized human face, rendered using the repoussé (embossing) technique. The facial features, eyebrows, nose, eyes and mouth are produced in relief, in the form of ridges.

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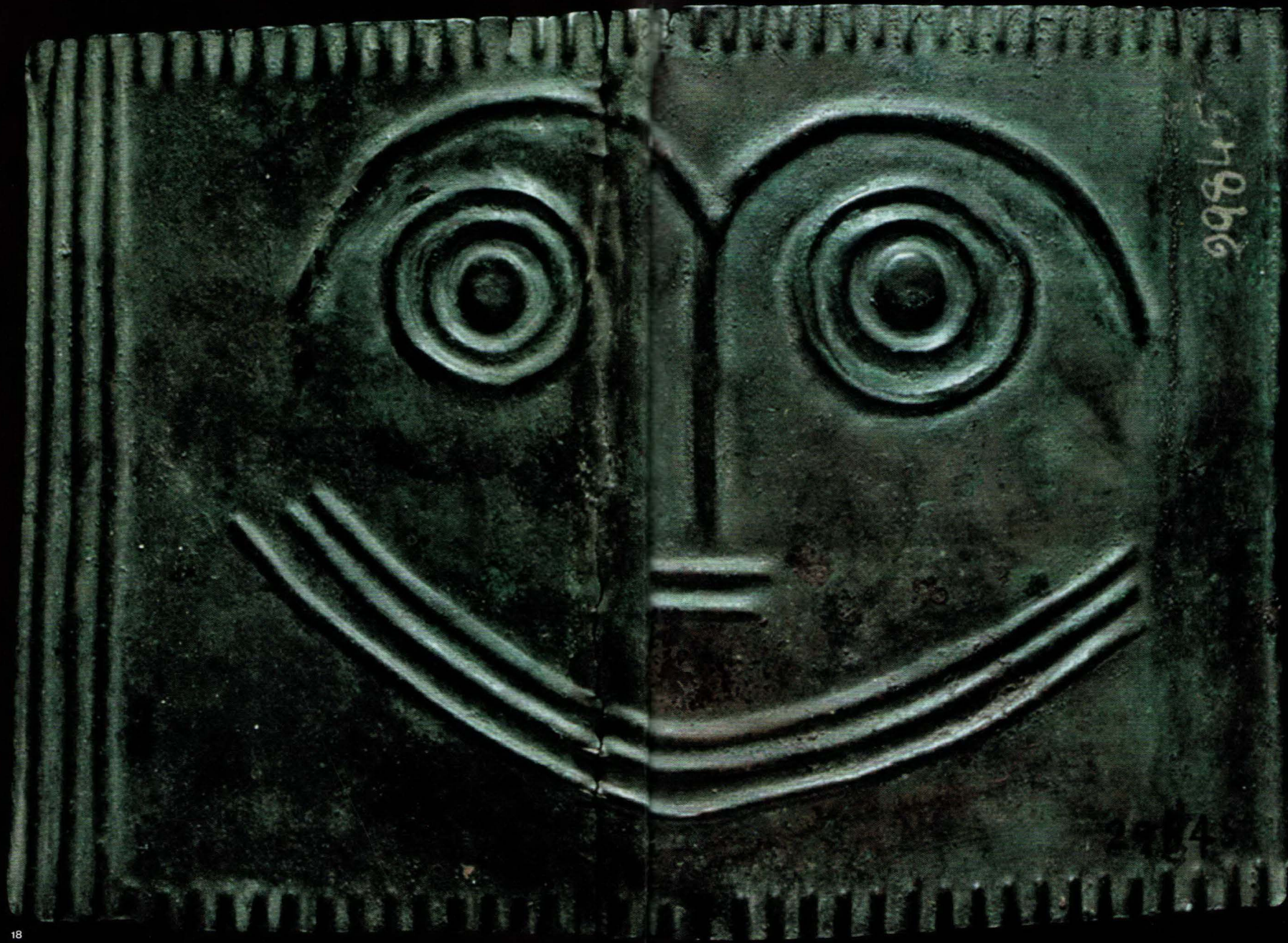


18

Sector B1

GREEK COLONIZATION

Towards the mid-8th century BC a process of large-scale Greek colonization of Sicily took place.

Indeed, at the time, local populations, especially those at sites on the island's coast, had already had frequent contacts with the Greek world, and had benefitted from these interactions.

This was the time when the *poleis*, ie cities, were being built in Greece. Groups of young men set off from some of these cities for the new lands in the West. They left their mother country behind, in order to travel to territories that were known from a very ancient tradition of voyages, accompanied by the benevolent aid of the gods, after consulting the oracle at Delphi. A glance at a map of these new colonies is enough to realize that their location could not have been better. They offered excellent harbours for boats, and they had prime defensive characteristics, as well as enjoying a good supply of fresh water and good communications. They also afforded access to inland areas, and, of course, locations that were suitable for the construction of an urban centre.

There was undoubtedly an element of adventure associated with these emigrations to establish new colonies. Nevertheless, these missions required perfect organization, from the moment of departure right up until the time when the new site was settled, and the land was divided up. Moreover, colonies were drawn up in accordance with an overall planning scheme whereby each zone was distributed in a regular, orderly way, with clearly defined public spaces, and spots set aside for sanctuaries.

Historians have long debated the purpose of these foundations. Discussion has tended to come down to a rather rigid opposition between trading colonies and farming colonies. However, the colonial phenomenon has seemed to be an essential condition for the survival of a certain form of society, with its internal needs, rather than the product of a community's desire to become wealthy from trade, or from possessing new lands.

Literary sources, especially the valuable *Archaiologia* by Thucydides (VI, 3-5), contain vital information regarding the earliest phases of this great phenomenon: from the names of the "oekists" in charge of the expeditions, to the provenance and composition of the contingents themselves.

Sicily's eastern coast was the first that lent itself to Greek colonization of the island, with Naxos, Zankle, Leontinoi and Katane, founded between 734 and 728 BC by people from the island of Euboea.

According to the sources, Archias, a member of the Bacchiadae clan, set sail from Corinth, putting in first at the island of Korkyra (already occupied by people from Eretria), and making an intermediate stop-off in Calabria, at Capo Zephyrion – where he allowed Dorians returning from Sicily to join his contingent bound for Syracuse. Then, in 734-33 BC, he founded Syracuse, which would later become one of the most illustrious and powerful cities in the Hellenized west.

We also know that, after several hardships, the people of Megara, led by Lamis, founded a colony on a strip of land in the territory of the king of the Siculi, Hyblon. In the first few years of the 7th century BC, on the southern coast, colonists from Crete and Rhodes were responsible for founding Gela, named after the river of the same name.

19

19. Fragment of a terracotta slab with decoration depicting one of the Labours of Heracles, from Naxos

page 37

20. Marble torso of a *kouros*, from Lentini

From Naxos comes a **fragment of a terracotta pediment slab** (fig. 19), found in an area outside the city limits, west of the Santa Venera seasonal stream. This relief sculpture, which was mould-made and of local workmanship, shows us part of a man's leg, ensnared by the coils of a snake. This would suggest one of the most famous of the Labours of Heracles, namely his fight against the many-headed Hydra.

The fragment, which dates to between 500 and 480 BC, is described by Paolo Orsi in one of his first notebooks. Shortly after arriving in Sicily, he saw the fragment on display in a small museum on one of his first visits, to Taormina. From there it was later moved to the Syracuse museum when its collections were installed in its new home, with a section devoted to Sicily's first colony.

The **torso of a *kouros*** (fig. 20) was found in the countryside outside the ancient city of Lentini. It was purchased by Paolo Orsi in 1904 from the Marchese di Castelluccio. It was one of the most prominent pieces in his rich collection, and, like many other similar statues, it must have had a funerary function, serving as a marker for a high-status grave.

The statue is of a naked young male, standing, and viewed frontally. The anatomical detail, shown by means of a sophisticated interplay of light and shadow, highlighting the vigour of the muscles in a faithful rendering of a naked figure, reveals an informed knowledge of the human body, and suggests a date between the end of the 6th and the early 5th centuries BC.

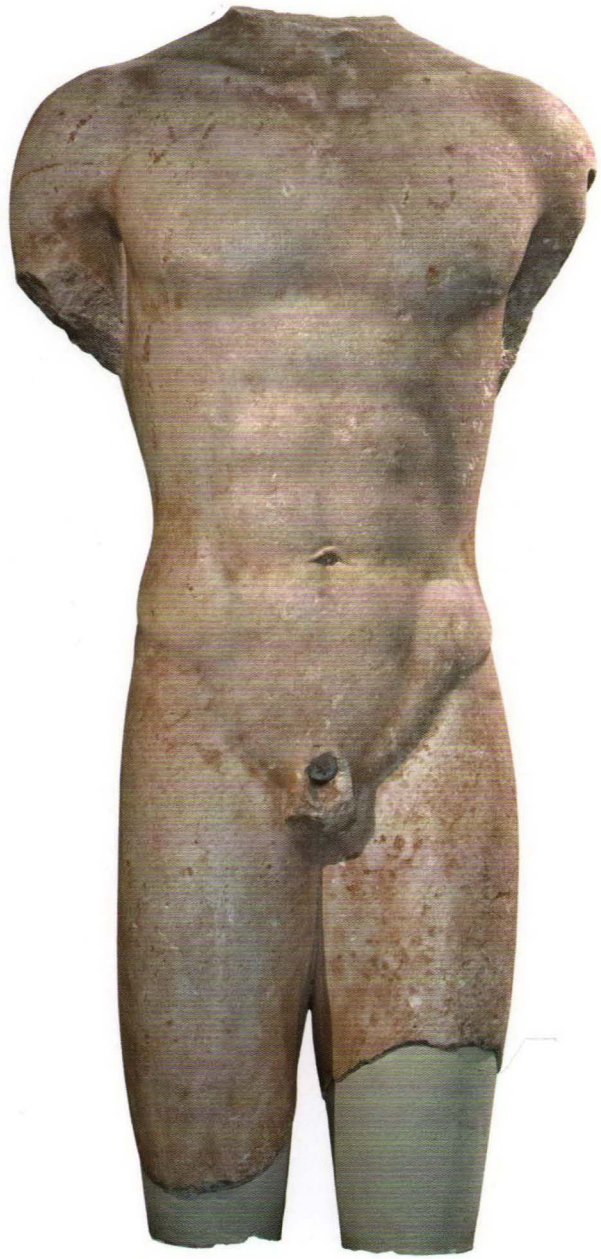
It has been suggested, as far back as Guido Libertini, that the head found around the mid-18th century by Ignazio Paternò Castello, the Prince of Biscari, and which is now held at the Castello Ursino Civic Museum in Catania, belonged to the Lentini torso, from which it may have become separated.

In recent years petrographic and geochemical analyses were conducted to determine whether the Biscari head belonged to the Lentini torso. These tests established that both finds came from a single block of marble from the Lakkoi quarries on the Greek island of Paros.

Excavations carried out at Lentini in 1933 unearthed a *lebes gamikòs*, a **marriage vase** (fig. 21). This lebes, attributed to the Hekate Painter, or the Syracuse 47099 Painter, and dated to around 360-340 BC, features numerous painted details in yellow and white, typical of the work of 4th century BC Siceliot craftsmen.

In the main scene, inside a small temple overpainted in white, we see a seated woman, perhaps Persephone, richly attired and wearing a diadem, and looking at herself in a mirror; a handmaiden stands facing her. To the right, outside the building there is another figure, perhaps Hekate, or, as per a more recent identification, Dionysus, bearing a torch.

On the other side, a female figure sits on a slight incline, with naked torso and adorned with rich jewellery; a tambourine is visible behind her back. She proffers a white sprig to a naked ephebos who, resting his left foot on a marker stone, holds a strigil in one hand and a small ointment bottle in the other. The scenes seem to refer to preparations for a marriage ceremony, and to the bride's toilette, in keeping with the specific purpose of the pottery vessel itself.



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The **terracotta actor's mask** (fig. 22) is the only surviving example of a theatrical mask from the archaic period. The mask could be attached to the actor's face: a hole behind the right ear allowed the wig to be attached. The facial features, reduced to their barest essentials, seem to hold a magnetic attraction: one is struck by the elongated eyes, with eyeballs, and holes corresponding to the iris, the eyebrows as extensions of the pronounced nose, the perforated nostrils, and the wide open mouth with large lips.

It has been suggested that the break along the edge of the mask was the reason why the mask was discarded. Actors in ancient theatre, shown gesticulating in the form of statuettes found among grave goods in the necropolises of Lipari and Kamarina, used to wear masks such as these.

An example of a portable altar, connected to household worship, is this **small arula** (fig. 23) found at Megara Hyblaea, in the area of the city. Its shape is a parallelepiped, with the outer edges having a quadrangular section. The front face depicts a relief scene, probably produced using a mould, of the episode described in Homer of the escape of Odysseus' companions from Polyphemus' cave. Indeed, one can see two small figures underneath the two large rams, clinging to their bellies. One is resting his head on the animal's chest, while the other, in an antithetical position, has his head under the ram's tail. It was certainly made by a local craftsman, and can be dated to the 6th century BC.

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21. *Lebes gamikos* (marriage vase), with rich polychrome decoration, from Lentini

22. Terracotta actor's mask from Megara Hyblaea

23. Terracotta arula showing Odysseus' companions fleeing cave of Polyphemus, from Megara Hyblaea

Recent scientific analyses have shown that the island of Naxos, and probably the Apollonas quarries, specifically, was the provenance of the marble *Kouros* statue of the **young Sombrotidas** (fig. 24).

It is of a young man viewed from the front: the head is missing, but at the back one can still see the lower part of the man's hairstyle, with his sculpted hair divided into long braids in small quadrangular bunches, gathered together and folded over themselves, and held in place by a narrow horizontal hairband. The archaic style of the statue can be seen in the treatment of the muscles, which are rendered as a rigid surface, devoid of tension.

The waist is narrow, and the left arm is held close to the body for almost its entire length. The hand is clenched, and turned slightly outwards. The thighs are full and elongated, with the left leg slightly in front of the right leg, which bears the weight of the body. On it is carved a vertical inscription, in the Megarian alphabet, to be read from the top downwards: it identifies the young man as a doctor, Sombrotidas, the son of Mandrocles.

This is the oldest attestation, from any Greek document, of a public doctor: the absence of a clan name in the inscription, and at the same time the lack of any records of a medical school in Sicily, have led people to believe that Sombrotidas was probably an immigrant to Megara, where he may have obtained citizenship thanks to his public merits.

It was a young student who informed the Superintendency of Syracuse, in 1940, of the finding of the Megara *kouros*. It came to light by chance, as the result of a landslip caused by heavy winter rains, at a small locality called Giannalena, on the steep rise that skirts the small plateau that, to the south, stands opposite the site of the city, in an area where there is a large necropolis. It is perhaps the best-known of that complex of *kouroi,* of votive or funerary origin, that have come down to us from several different findspots in the Siceliot area and in Magna Graecia. The difficulty in placing them in their artistic and historical context is highlighted by the differing theories regarding their origin, especially when it comes to statues made of marble. Initially, the scant availability of this raw material in western areas led to the belief that they were imported as completed works, or else that the marble itself was imported, and was then sculpted locally by Greek sculptors. Later, as the number of known works increased, thanks to more finds being made and more knowledge being acquired, it was thought that a school was set up that passed on to local sculptors the technical skills and ability to work marble. The statue was completed in Sicily, as shown by the deeply-incised inscription. However, the sculptor left connecting stone between the arms and the legs. This was probably not so much to avert the risks of damage during transit from the place of production to the statue's destination, and was rather with a view to finishing touches being carried out once it had travelled away from the source of the marble.

24. Marble statue of Sombrotidas, from Megara Hyblaea

24

The north-west necropolis of Megara Hyblaea was the findspot of the limestone ***Kourotrophos*** statue (fig. 25). Erected as a grave-marker, the statue indicated the role of the deceased woman, underlining the symbolic importance of motherhood as a guarantee of the continuity of her family line.

During excavation work using a mechanical drill, carried out overnight between 29 and 30 October 1952 in a part of the site where other tombs had already been found and excavated, the workmen, believing that it was just a simple boulder, smashed the work into more than 900 pieces.

Patient restoration work made it possible to reassemble this very fine masterpiece, in which one can still see, in several places, faint traces of the original polychrome decoration.

The female figure, sculpted from a single block, is devoid of its head; she sits on a stool with the edges shown in relief, and her arms are open as she embraces twin infants in her lap, one lying across the other. Wrapped in swaddling cloths, with the original red colour showing faintly through, they clasp her breasts as she breastfeeds them. The woman's hands and toes, clearly picked out, albeit sketchily, together with her collar-bone that stands out from the opening of her chiton, are the only parts of her body that are uncovered, the remainder being covered by a cloak that envelops the figure.

In his work, the Megarian artist who made this sculptural group, which is typically archaic in its conception of compact volume, and unique in the context of archaic works of this type, betrays several clear influences also from the eastern Greek world.

Recent interpretations have suggested that the work may represent Nyx (Night). Celebrated by Hesiod, Nyx was the mother of Hypnos (Sleep) and of Thanatos (Death). This deity had an oracle at Megara Nisea, the city where the oekist and military commander Lamis, founder of Megara Hyblaea, came from.

25. Limestone *kourotrophos* statue, from Megara Hyblaea

25

Sector B2

GREEK SYRACUSE: ORTYGIA, THE SACRED AREAS, THE NECROPOLISES

When Archias sailed to Sicily with his men, in 734 BC, and settled on the small island of Ortygia, founding Syrakousai, the island was not uninhabited: man had lived here for more than 4,000 years, and there was a Native hamlet there, up until the arrival of the Greeks in the 8th century BC.

Archaeological investigations carried out in what is now Piazza Duomo revealed that this part of the island was chosen as the acropolis, the citadel, and that the settlers immediately built a sacred building (*oikos*, namely "home"), over which they built an archaic temple a century and a half later (7th-6th century BC).

The colony was organized by distributing regular plots of land, thereby establishing a town plan consisting of parallel and perpendicular streets.

This sector tells the history of the first few centuries of the colony of Syracuse: the exhibition begins with material relating to the prehistoric settlement of Ortygia, from the Neolithic to the Recent Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, including recent additions from the Piazza Duomo excavations, showing that the site was used for sacred purposes ever since the Early Bronze Age.

The material on view in the display cases also gives an insight into the stratigraphic sequence up until the modern era: particular importance is given to sanctuaries (the Apollonion, the Athenaion, the area of the Ionian Temple, and the area sacred to Demeter and Kore near the Cassa di Risparmio bank), to minor places of worship, and to the Il Fusco and Giardino Spagna necropolises.

Near the mouth of the river Ciane, named after the nymph Cyane, who tried to oppose the abduction of Kore by Hades, this large **limestone female head** (fig. 26), was found in the Laganello district, the site of an important sanctuary standing outside the city, connected to the cult of Demeter and Kore. Here solemn annual celebrations were held in honour of the young woman, in accordance with norms set out by Heracles, who first established the ceremony while passing through on one of his heroic feats.

The size of the head, which is larger than normal, the high *polos* (cylindrical crown), and the place where it was found lead one to suppose that it belonged to a cult statue. The head has variously been identified as being of Demeter, or of the nymph Cyane, and is thought to be the first large statue in the west, made by Syracusan artists who drew their inspiration from models from their homeland, in Greece, at the beginning of the 6th century BC.

The ***Artemis oenochoe*** (fig. 27), a fine Protocorinthian work, was found near the *oikos*, the oldest cult building unearthed in the Piazza Duomo area. The decorated frieze consists in a series of animals, both real and fantastic, and a speeding chariot, on either side of an Artemis Potnia Theron, or 'Queen of Animals'. The image has been said to be the earliest evidence of Artemis-worship, the first goddess to be venerated on the island of Ortygia.

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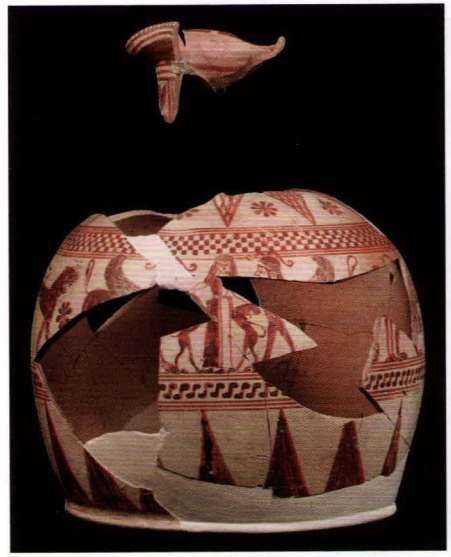

27

26. Head of a female deity from Laganello, a district of Syracuse

27. Protocorinthian *oenochoe* showing goddess Artemis, Mistress of Animals, from Syracuse

28

28. Large *oenochoe* with decorative bands filled with animal motifs, from Athenaion area

A large globular ***oenochoe*** (fig. 28), found by Paolo Orsi in the Athenaion area, is among the finest examples of the Wild Goat Style, produced in East Greece between the mid-7th century and the mid-6th century BC, the style taking its name from the animal that most often appears in the animal friezes.

The decoration is divided into seven bands running around the body of the vase: the first with a series of lotus flowers and buds; the five bands below with a series of quadrupeds (bulls, lions, boars) or grazing goats alternating with birds and winged griffins. Rosettes in the form of daubs, dots, or festoons, and small crosses and garlands fill the background. There is a frieze of birds along the neck. The lip is adorned with two moulded winged lions, and the top of the handle ends in two applied, moulded scrolls.

One of the prominent sectors of the city as regards urban development and architecture is Piazza della Vittoria, south of the Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Lacrime. During excavations carried out in several stages in the 1970s, a large sanctuary dating to the period of the Dionysii was uncovered here. The large votive deposit, from which an exceptional number of *ex votos* has come, was part of this sanctuary.

The display cases present a simplification of the various kinds of **dedicated statuettes** (fig. 29) in the sanctuary. Referring to Demeter-worship are the standing figures, in draped clothing, with an ornate *polos* decorated with rosettes, in a great variety of poses, and featuring an equally varied range of offerings and attributes in terms of their type and combinations: a piglet, a lighted torch, and a tray of food. The figures engaged in the act of unveiling the bride can be referred to the cult of Kore-Persephone, to the sphere of marriage, and the institution of the Anakalypteria (unveiling) ceremonies. The examples on display can be dated between the end of the 5th and the early 4th centuries BC.

Archaeological investigations in the area of the Madonna delle Lacrime sanctuary, at the time when it was built, in the second half of the 1960s, also revealed the remains of residential blocks: from these the so-called Well of Artemis, the infill of which is characterized by a deposit of votive material, yielded ceramics, draped female statuettes, and polychrome busts denoting the presence, in the 4th-3rd centuries BC, of a place of worship, sacred to Artemis and to chthonic deities.

A **large bust** (fig. 30), patiently reconstructed from fragments, of elegant and sophisticated workmanship, brought to life by vivid polychromy, is certainly unique in terms of its quality: the youthful splendour and delicacy of the facial features are reminiscent of the image of the *nymphe*, the young girl who achieves womanhood through marriage. The bust also reminds one of a passage in Timaeus reporting that, in the era of Dionysius I, young girls would dance at night around the statue of the goddess in the city. The same dances are shown in a panel painted on the clothing of another example that came from the 1957-58 excavations in the Akradina district, currently on display in sector D.

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29. Ex voto statuettes from sacred area of Piazza della Vittoria, in Syracuse

30

30. Large female bust from so-called Well of Artemis, near Piazza della Vittoria in Syracuse

The oldest and largest necropolis in Greek Syracuse is the Il Fusco necropolis, which was contemporary with the city's foundation. It stood along the main road that led into the surrounding territory, on the fringes of the ancient marsh, Lisimelia, in what is now the Pantanelli district. This necropolis was used uninterruptedly up until the Roman period. The predominant burial type was a rock-cut tomb covered with large stone slabs, sometimes with an upper sill, or ledge. The deceased is usually laid in a reclining position in the grave; in some cases, iron or bronze nails indicate that there was a wooden coffin. Richer, more elaborate burials contain stone sarcophagi. There are some recorded cases of secondary cremation burials inside a bronze "lebes".

Found by Paolo Orsi in 1893 in tomb 500, the **large Subgeometric krater** (fig. 31) contained the skeletons of two infants. The vase, datable to the first 30 years of the 7th century BC, is the work of artisans from the city of Argo, who emigrated to Syracuse. Especially noteworthy is the horse figure – Argo was known as the nurturer of horses (*hippoboton*) – in terms of the articles designed to accompany the deceased. Indeed, the horse underlines the aristocratic and military status of the deceased, as a member of the city's elite class.

The earliest investigations at the Fusco necropolis unearthed the tomb of a child whose grave goods included this **bronze horse figurine** (fig. 32), which has become the symbol of our Museum. Dating to the Late Geometric period (710-700 BC), made in Corinth (or perhaps imitating the Corinthian style), it is among the rarest finds of its kind found in the Greek west, being limited to Taranto, Locri, Syracuse and Kaulonia. It is also distinguished by its fine workmanship.

The **bell krater** (fig. 33) showing the Greek hero Philoctetes in his cave on the island of Lemnos, attributed to the Dirce Painter, and dated to between 380 and 370 BC, was found by Paolo Orsi in 1915 at the eastern extremity of tomb 616, a grave dug into the rock. In the middle of the grave was an aristocratic burial, with a large bronze funerary "lebes" placed inside a limestone chest, protected by a stone slab, dated to around 500 BC. Two other cremation burials were later added, inside a decorated krater, and placed at the head of the grave. Only a few fragments survive of one of the vases, the other is the krater by the Dirce Painter, depicting Philoctetes on Lemnos, and the mission to bring the weapons of Heracles back to Troy, which would ensure that the Greeks conquered the city.

31. Subgeometric krater made by craftsmen in the city of Argo

32. Small bronze horse from Il Fusco necropolis

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33. Bell krater by the Dirce Painter showing myth of Philoctetes, from Il Fusco necropolis

34. Small vase for perfumes or ointments in shape of small lion, from the Giardino Spagna necropolis

35. Krater by the Capodarso Painter, with a scene from *Oedipus Rex*, from excavations at the Civic Hospital

The **vase modelled in the shape of a lion** (fig. 34) comes from the archaic necropolis of Giardino Spagna. A highly sophisticated and very rare object, it takes the form of a three-dimensional rendering of the lions of Middle Eastern origin that were among the favourite subjects of painters of Corinthian vases. The vase shown differs from other, similar vases by its high technical and artistic quality, which makes it one of the finest examples of those containers of aromatic essences and ointments that were very common in archaic necropolises.

The **red-figure Siceliot calyx krater** (fig. 35), found in tomb 34 in the area south of the Civic Hospital, and dated to the third quarter of the 4th century BC, is attributed to the Capodarso Painter. The scene is taken from Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*.

The action itself takes place against the background of stage scenery: the main characters are foregrounded in spaces separated by pilasters. The scene shows the moment when, in Sophocles' tragedy, the old messenger announces to Oedipus the death of his (adoptive) father Polybus, and reveals to him the secret of his birth. Abandoned as a baby to avert a prophecy that Laius would be killed by his son, and that his son would marry his own mother, the infant, rescued from death and taken to Corinth, was adopted by the city's rulers, who were childless. The scene shows the dramatic moment when Jocasta realizes, to her horror, that she is the mother of her own spouse, and prepares to put an end to her life.

The presence of the daughters, Antigone and Ismene, who only appear at the end of Sophocles' play, increases the sense of poignancy, and highlights the painter's originality in his reworking of the play.

The **monumental Attic calyx krater** (fig. 36), used as a funerary urn, from tomb 41 of the Giardino Spagna necropolis, is attributed to the Antimenes Painter, and dates to around 520 BC.

The krater is noteworthy both for its size and the richness of its decoration: the main scene shows a divine chariot procession, perhaps the arrival of Heracles on Mount Olympus. From the left one sees a bearded Dionysus wearing an ivy wreath, with a *kantharos* in his left hand and a vine-branch in his right hand, the helmeted Athena in the act of ascending a chariot, as she holds the reins, a male figure (probably Heracles) by her side, on the chariot, Apollo Citharoedus, and a female figure partially hidden by the chariot horses. In front of the horses, Hermes seems to lightly touch the face of a girl who stands facing him.

The reverse shows Dionysus with his procession of satyrs and maenads.

Among the most interesting finds made in the area of the Apollonion is a **statue of a scribe in grey granite** (fig. 37), found in 1864 in the infill of the temple's east portico. The inscription, in Egyptian hieroglyphs, on the central band and on the sides of his kilt, identify him as Petu-Amon-Apet (Petamenophis/Pediamenopet), a high-ranking Theban official, the chief lector priest in the 26th dynasty. A striking number of monuments associated with him are known, including the statues in the Karnak Cachette, and the large tomb (TT33) in the necropolis at Thebes (656-625 BC).

The figure is shown sitting cross-legged, with an unfurled papyrus scroll on his knees. Some people believe the statue came to Syracuse in

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36. Calyx krater by the Antimenes Painter, from the Giardino Spagna necropolis

37. Granite statue of a scribe, from Temple of Apollo area

the Hellenistic period, when, following the introduction of Egyptian cults, there was a rise in imported Egyptian works, in order to adorn places of worship. Others think it likely that the work came to Syracuse as far back as the archaic period, via trade with Rhodes.

One of the symbols of the Museum of Syracuse is the very famous **relief terracotta slab** (fig. 38) found in the Athenaion area, showing the Gorgon in the traditional archaic pose of running on its knees, with its sons Pegasus, to the right, and Chrisaor, to the left (now lost). It has been suggested that the slab was part of the triangular pediment of a miniature shrine, and that it was flanked by members of the cat family, in their role as guardians, as in the wonderful composition of the Corfu Artemision. However, it is possible that it adorned the metope of a larger shrine, an altar, or a throne.

The composition displays a vivid, lively polychromy that emphasizes the monstrous features of the Gorgon. In just one image, the scene sums up the 'apotropaic' element, the horrifying Gorgoneion, and the narrative element, with the birth of its sons that follows the monster's decapitation at the hands of the hero Perseus. The allusion to the myth of Bellerophon and Pegasus was probably connected to the celebration of the Bacchiadae, the aristocratic family of Corinth, which provided the impulse for the founding of Syracuse.

The slab appears in the space that displays the three-dimensional models of the three major temples at Ortygia: the Apollonion, the Athenaion, and the Ionian temple. The area of the Athenaion, explored by Paolo Orsi between 1912 and 1917, yielded several important finds, including architectural decorations and decorative elements belonging to several different sacred buildings in the sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Athena. In the case of the temple, built in the first half of the 5th century BC, and now incorporated within the structure of the cathedral of Syracuse, the model allows us to understand the structure, and its relation to the other major building, the Ionic temple, the remains of which, currently open to visitors, are to be found below Palazzo Vermexio, which houses the city hall.

The other models illustrate the walls and roof structure of the Apollonion, one of the very earliest Greek temples built wholly in stone. Its outer colonnade consisted in powerful monolithic columns (six along the short sides, and 17 along the long sides), arranged in double rows along the eastern side on a raised platform with steps leading up to it. The inscription in Greek letters is in situ, and can still be read. It is unique in the Greek world, and is located on the highest step of the eastern facade, with the building's dedication to Apollo by Kleomedes (or Kleomenes).

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38. Slab depicting the Gorgon, found by Orsi in excavations at Athenaion

Sector C

SYRACUSE'S COLONIES, AND HELLENIZED NATIVE CITIES

Sector C of the museum contains finds from cities founded by Syracuse, asserting control over the south-eastern tip of the island: Akre, the modern-day Palazzolo Acreide, Kasmene (identified in the area of Monte Casale, on Mount Lauro), and Kamarina, founded by Syracuse between the Irminio and the Ippari rivers, on the southern coast of Sicily, right opposite the coast of north Africa.

Of particular interest are the finds from acquisitions and excavations, mostly conducted by Paolo Orsi between the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century, in towns in the Plain of Catania, evidence of the process of Hellenization of the Native culture that was in contact with the Greek world of the colonies: the local communities gradually acquired their habits, customs, rituals, and language, facilitating integration processes that were destined to be long-lasting.

From excavations in the 1970s came the extraordinary finds from the sanctuary of Francavilla in the Alcantara Valley, near the Greek colony of Naxos.

In the final section, space is given above all to finds from the excavations in the last century at Gela: not only the rich grave goods from the necropolises, but also the votive terracottas from the Bitalemi sanctuary area, and the elaborate architectural decorations on the sacred buildings.

Casmenae, on the modern-day Monte Casale, is Syracuse's sub-colony in the area immediately inland from it. It was built to defend the road along the Hyblaean plateau. Remains of the city consist in traces of the archaic settlement and the foundations of a temple, dated to around 600 BC, and dedicated to a female deity, Hera or Athena. Votive offerings were dedicated to her along the southern side of the sanctuary precinct. The decorative terracotta elements, which were later reworked, and that protected the wooden structure of the temple's roof, belong to two different phases, while it has been suggested that the *kore* or **red-figure calyx krater** (fig. 39), carved in high relief in local limestone, belonged to the first construction phase. It was found by chance not far from a large spring flowing from a natural cave on the south side of Monte Casale, and it was acquired by Orsi in October 1932.

A number of extraordinarily important finds have been made in the territory in the immediate hinterland of Syracuse. The Siceliot **red-figure kylix krater** (fig. 40), attributed to the Monumental Vase Group, part of the Lentini-Manfria Group, and dated to the third quarter of the 4th century BC, comes from Canicattini Bagni. The krater contained a small lead urn with the remains of a cremated individual, presumably a high-status woman. Appearing in the main scene, with the columns of a temple in the background, are the daughters of Proetus, king of Tiryns, who were stricken with madness after having offended a deity. After many wanderings and frenzied ravings, they were cured by Melampus of Pylos, the soothsayer and healer. The scene on the other side has the wild dancing of Maenads and Satyrs taking part in orgiastic rituals in honour of Dionysus.

39

39. Limestone kore with dove, from Monte Casale

40

40. Magnificent calyx krater showing myth of daughters of Proteus, from Canicattini Bagni

41

41. Terracotta horseman from Kamarina

In evoking the restoration of order after isolation and flight, the Proetides theme is linked to the transition from girlhood to becoming a bride, and motherhood.

Kamarina, one of Syracuse's most important sub-colonies, was founded in 598 BC on the southern coast of the island, in order to provide the main city with a safe harbour and, at the same time, to contain the expansion of the nearby city of Gela. Near the mouth of the river Hipparis, where the city's port-canal is located, this **terracotta horseman** (fig. 41), dated to the first half of the 6th century BC, was found: It is an acroterion that was also an integral part of the *kalyptèr hegemón*, the main roof tile at the top of the building. The horseman could be one of the Dioscuri, and if so this could have been part of the terracotta decorations of a temple dedicated to the twin brothers, Castor and Pollux, the patrons of sailors. This would explain why it would have been located at the mouth of the river.

The classical necropolis at Passo Marinaro is the provenance of many of the Attic vases, both black-figure and red-figure pieces, produced at important Attic workshops, which formed the grave goods of tombs that belonged to high status individuals. Such items are valuable documents for reconstructing trade dynamics in the period, and the ancient city's system of wealth.

One of the most precious of these is the **Attic red-figure bell krater** (fig. 42) attributed to the Polygnotus Group, and dated to approximately 450-425 BC. The main scene shows Apollo in the centre, with his harp, offering Artemis a *phiale* – an ancient Greek ritual vessel that was round, with a low rim. The standing goddess, armed with a bow and quiver, holds out an arm to crown him. Between the brother and sister stands the youth Ganymede, the gods' cup-bearer, with an *oenochoe* in his right hand and, in his left hand, a hoop and a stick, a child's toy. The scene is completed by the mother of the two deities, Leto, wearing a cloak, and Hermes with a petasus, a wide-brimmed hat. Here he has wings, and his sandals are also winged. He has a caduceus, the staff with snakes and wings, the attribute of heralds and messengers.

In 1922 Orsi found, in the necropolis in the Fossa di Monte San Basilio district north of the modern-day town of Scordia (near Catania), the grave goods of the tomb that he called the tomb of the "unknown leader". Dated to just after the mid-4th century BC, it belonged to a mercenary soldier from Campania. It consists in an **anatomical bronze cuirass** (fig. 43), cut off at the level of the navel, of a type common in Campania and Lucania, an Italic belt, some spearheads, and a curved iron dagger commonly used by mounted soldiers, and finally an iron lampstand. This cavalry soldier from Campania, who came to Sicily as a mercenary, had probably been the commander of the fortress on Monte San Basilio.

42

42. Bell krater attributed to Polygnotus Group, from Kamarina

43

43. Bronze cuirass from grave goods found in the Tomb of the Unknown Leader, near Scordia

44

44. The goddess of Grammichele

From the Native settlement at modern-day Grammichele, perhaps identifiable as ancient Echetla, come a number of extraordinarily interesting finds, most of them recovered by Paolo Orsi between the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century.

Found in the votive deposit on the Madonna del Piano hill, this terracotta statue was pieced back together from numerous fragments, and is known as the **goddess of Grammichele** (fig. 44). The deity, identified as Demeter, is shown enthroned, with a pomegranate in her right hand, held to her chest. She wears a chiton, a gathered tunic, and a *himation*, a cloak with wide folds, draped over her knees. She wears elegant sandals, and her feet rest on a stool. The hairstyle is elaborate: the hair is held in place over the forehead by a *stephane* (crown), and long braids hang down over the shoulders. The eyes are large and give the face, which has very clearly defined features, an animated expression. The work, perhaps a gift offering, was made by a workshop in the Syracuse area around the year 520 BC, and reveals Ionian influences.

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45. Laconian krater by "Painter of the Grammichele krater"

45

The Casa Cantoniera necropolis, explored by Paolo Orsi at the end of the 19th century, is situated in modern-day Terravecchia. The excavations were resumed in the 1980s, and tomb 16, which contained the remains of more than one person, and more than 100 Native-made, colonial and Greek pots, yielded this exceptional, Laconian-made **black-figure krater** (fig. 45).

Attributed to a master vase-painter working in the circle of the Naucratis Painter, known as the "Painter of the Grammichele krater", it can be dated to 570-560 BC.

The band on the belly of the vase is decorated on one side with a battle between two hoplites, armed with helmets, shields and spears, witnessed by two men on horseback. The other side depicts a cavalcade of naked ephebi, followed by dogs, skilfully painted between the horses' hooves, while birds fly overhead. The secondary decoration is also rich and elaborate, on the lip, on the handles, on the lower part of the vase, and on the foot. This is indeed a valuable object, the finest Laconic vase known from Sicily, and thus it is natural to suppose that the tomb belonged to a high-ranking personage.

The excavations carried out by Paolo Orsi at Monte San Mauro, near Caltagirone, at the start of the 20th century, later resumed in the 1970s by the Superintendency of Syracuse, being continued in recent years by the Superintendency of Catania in collaboration with the University of Catania, have revealed a Greek city, first built at the end of the 7th century BC. It is probably to be identified with Chalcidian Euboea.

From the so-called *anaktoron* excavated by Paolo Orsi, probably the site of the archive, and perhaps the meeting-place of the body of magistrates in charge of administering justice, come the **fragments of twelve bronze platelets** (fig. 46), with inscriptions in the Chalcidian alphabet, datable to the second half of the 6th century BC.

These were two versions of a law on murders, the second of which, on the front, sets out fines for those guilty, and mentions a Council of the Four Hundred. The legislative code of Monte San Mauro seems to be a reflection of the code promulgated by Charondas of Catania, and adopted by other Chalcidian cities.

The Greek city of Francavilla di Sicilia, in the Alcantara Valley, perhaps identifiable as ancient Kallipolis, already a sanctuary to Demeter and Kore at the end of the 7th century BC, on the north-west outskirts of the city, has yielded an extraordinary group of ***pinakes***; mould-made, relief-decorated terracotta plaques. Their style and iconography make them similar to examples from the sanctuary of Persephone in the Mannella district of Locri Epizefiri, in Calabria.

The scenes shown (fig. 47) are connected to the myth of Persephone, and symbolically linked to rites of passage from girlhood to adulthood: the offering to Persephone of the ball, a symbol of childhood games; Kore's abduction by Hades; the sacred marriage between Persephone and Hades in the presence of other deities, such as Hermes and Dionysus; and the opening of the 'sacred chest' with the divine child, and the offering of wedding gifts.

46

46. Two of the twelve bronze platelets from Monte San Mauro

47

47. Pinax from Francavilla, with the faces of Persephone-Hera and Zeus Eleutherios

The Native site in the Mendolito district, built on a volcanic terrace along the left bank of the river Simeto, north-west of Adrano, or perhaps more probably the nearby district of Polichello, is the provenance of the **statuette of an ephebus or athlete** (fig. 48), a minor masterpiece of bronzework.

Some scholars have seen in it an echo of the art of Pythagoras of Reggio, a Greek sculptor active in the first half of the 5th century BC. More specifically, it is said to echo the statue of the wrestler Leontiskos, the winner of Olympic contests.

A large room in sector C contains the **architectural terracottas** (fig. 49) from the urban sanctuary of Athena on the acropolis of Gela, corresponding today to the Molino a Vento hill.

As well as decorations of the roof's timbering, fragments also survive of the terracotta sculptures from Temple B: these depict men on horseback in the form of the central acroterion, moulded as an extension of the rooftile on the top part of the roof. The winged lions and sphinxes appear as lateral acroteria, and can be dated to around the mid-6th century BC.

The figure of an archer, standing out against a black background on a slab, is part of a decorative architectural scheme, a metope or pediment.

In the centre of the pediment there appeared a *gorgoneion* in low relief, distinguished by the stylization of the details: large almond eyes, grimacing mouth with protruding tusks, and hair and wings in the form of spirals, following the outline of the face. The horrifying appearance of the mask was also emphasized by the use of colour.

Among the finest vases from the necropolises at Gela is **an Attic red-figure *pelike*** (fig. 50), which clearly bears the signature of the vase-painter Polygnotus, datable to 440-430 BC.

On the obverse there is a mounted Amazon, armed with a spear, against whom a warrior advances with his sword drawn, holding up a large round shield. The Amazon is dressed in eastern costume, with a long-sleeved tunic and *anaxyrides*, embroidered trousers, and is wearing the characteristic small laced boots, the *endromides*.

The reverse of the vase shows a conversation scene between a bearded man and two women.

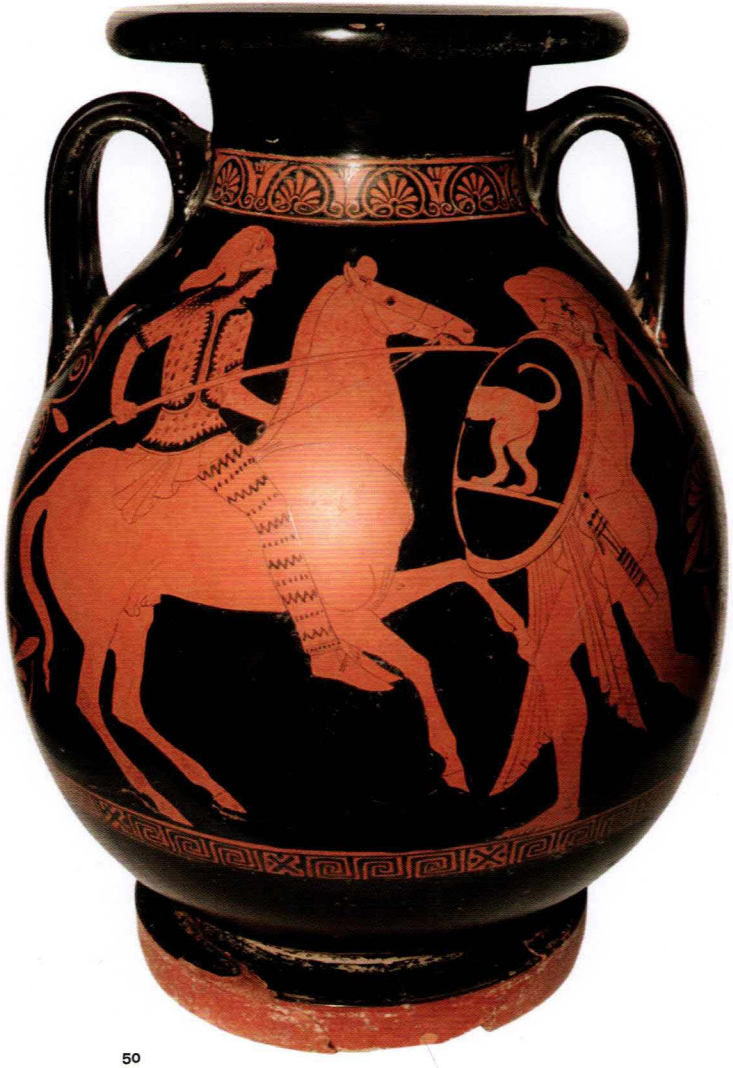
Discovered along with other finds in a votive deposit linked to a sulphur spring at Tumazzo, just north of the mouth of the river Palma, near the modern town of Palma di Montechiaro, in the territory of Agrigento, were three exceptional *xoana*, **female statuettes carved in wood** (fig. 51), made from cypress and poplar. They are in the typical frontal, rigid position of the most archaic phase of Greek sculpture, the so-called "Daedalic" phase. The forearms are extended, holding out an offering or an attribute. One is dated to the end of the 7th century, and the others to the first quarter of the 6th century BC. They owe their exceptional state of preservation to the chemical and physical conditions in the deposit in which they were immersed.

48

48. Bronze statuette of an ephebus or athlete, from Adrano

49

49. Architectural terracottas from sanctuary of Athena at Gela



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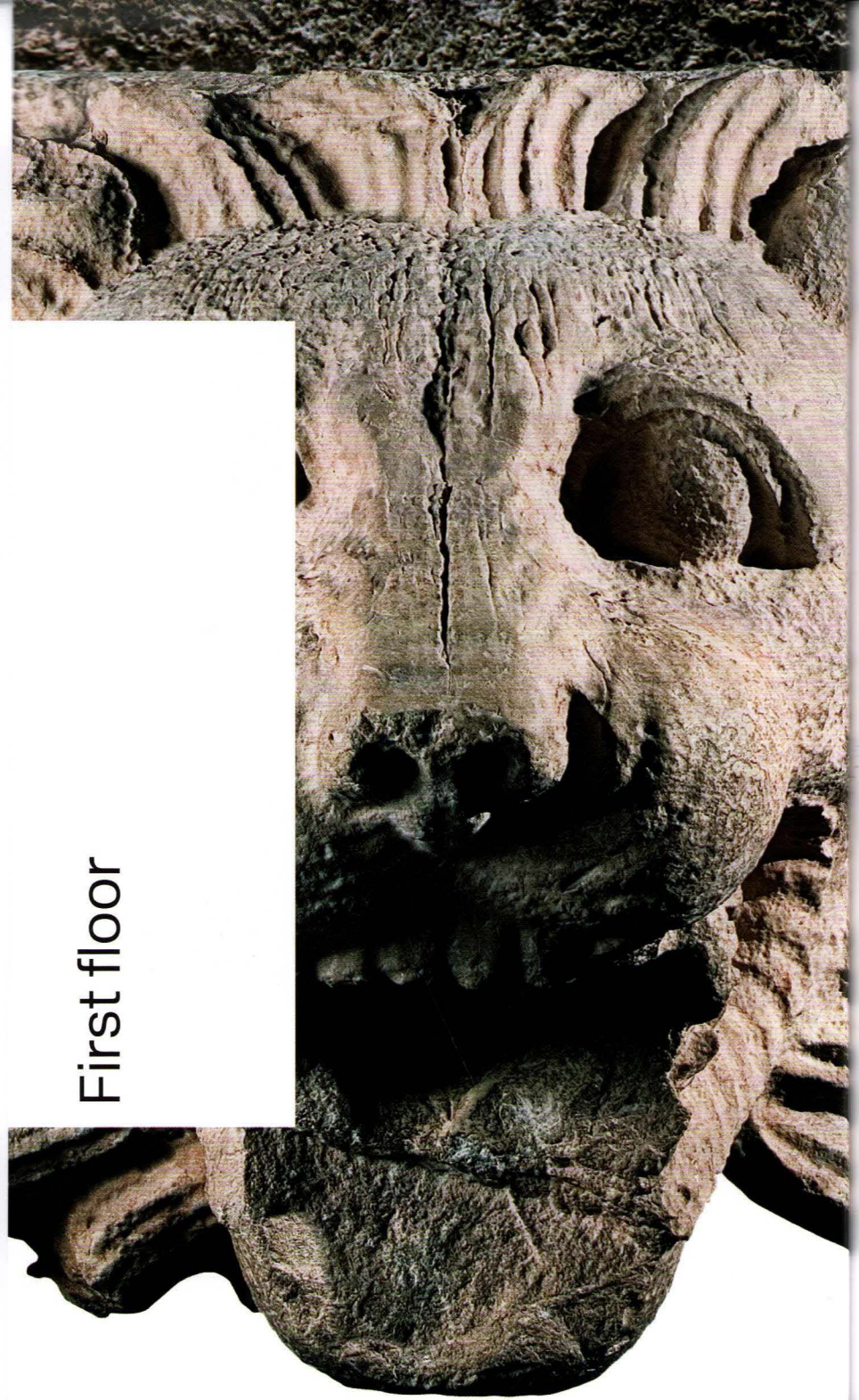
50. Athenian black-figure *pelike* signed by vase-painter Polygnotus, from Gela

51

51. Wooden female statuettes from a votive deposit from Palma di Montechiaro



First floor

Sector D

SYRACUSE IN THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PERIODS

Dedicated to Syracuse in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, this is the first of the three sectors on the Museum's upper floor. It was opened in May 2006. The finds bear witness to the city's political and cultural role, in the last period of its autonomy, under the reign of Hiero II: This was a long period of prosperity, both as a result of measures aimed at increasing agricultural output, and owing to a shrewd pro-Roman foreign policy.

The huge sums of money that flowed into the state's coffers, thanks to cereal exports, customs duties, and tithes levied on crops, allowed Hiero II to set up urban and architectural projects on a monumental scale, designed to represent kingly power, and to legitimize his dynasty: the Theatre and the Colle Temenite complex, the Altar that was as long as a stadium (circa 184 m), the Euryalus fortress defences, and the buildings mentioned in the sources, the Olympieion of Achradina, the palace of Ortygia, with the fortified stores and arsenals, and the Syracusia, a colossal cargo ship and ceremonial vessel, designed by Archias of Corinth, under the supervision of Archimedes.

Along the exhibition route, famous and celebrated statues, such as the Landolina Venus, together with others that are less well-known, are arranged according to chronology and topography. Excavations in the city have unearthed residential urban districts and luxury dwellings. It has even been possible to reconstruct, albeit only in part, their internal distribution and furnishings. Ritual finds confirm that religions of eastern origin, such as the Cybele and Attis cults, and the Isis and Serapis cults, and, in the middle Imperial period, Mithras worship, were common, ever since the Hellenistic period. The statues, architectural sculptures and Imperial portraits from major public complexes such as the Theatre, the Amphitheatre, the Forum, the so-called Roman Gymnasium, and the Euryalus castle testify to the cultural and artistic level of the great metropolis.

The exhibition display also includes decorated ceramics and terracottas, made in craft workshops in Syracuse. The final sector, devoted to necropolises, allows visitors to trace the topographic and chronological development of the burial areas, between the 4th century BC and the 7th century AD, in relation to the expansion and contraction of the urban site.

In the Borgata Santa Lucia district, inside an artificial cave, a marble statuette of a **resting Heracles** was found (fig. 52). The space was used as the storage area of a sculptor's workshop, perhaps the same sculptor who restored the statue's base, along with the 10 limestone lion-headed water spouts that were part of the system of roof gutters, on display in the rack alongside, which constituted a collection of sample models to be shown to prospective clients.

The Ercolino, as it was called on account of its small size, is the work of a sculptor who is strongly influenced by the work of the great sculptor Lysippos. The sculpture here may be compared to his famous statue of the athlete Agias on the basis of its style and details, dating to the early 3rd century BC.

52

52. Marble statuette of Heracles, from the Borgata district in Syracuse

53. Statue of the god Priapus, from Viale Paolo Orsi in Syracuse

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54. The Landolina Venus

53

Discovered by chance in 1972, inside a water cistern in Viale Paolo Orsi, this statue of **Priapus** (fig. 53) dominates the entrance to the sector. Carved in local limestone by a Syracusan artist, it is an original work dating to the late 3rd century BC. It may have adorned a garden, or a park, perhaps in the area where Via Basento and Piazza Adda now stand, a public and monumental zone of the city in the Hellenistic period, which was destroyed when it was sacked by the Romans in 212 BC. The sculpture is one of the earliest forms of evidence of the worship of Priapus, a deity who symbolized the sexual instinct, and the male power to procreate. It was the genius (divine spirit) of fertility, and was venerated in the countryside, in vineyards, and in gardens. It was introduced into Sicily in the Hellenistic era, perhaps also via the official propaganda of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, ruler of Egypt, in whose celebratory procession the image of the god appeared alongside Dionysus.

Found on 7 January 1804 in the Orti Bonavia, near what is now the Civic Hospital, by Saverio Landolina, this Venus Anadyomene, or Venus "Rising From the Sea", was named the **Landolina Venus** (fig. 54).

Also found along with the statue were columns and architectural elements, which suggested that it was sited within a Nymphaeum. This exceptional find caused quite a stir, and not just in the city itself, as evidenced by the government's repeated requests for the Venus to be transferred, first to the Royal Palace of Naples and later to Palermo. Soon news of the find was also heard abroad: numerous foreign travellers made the trip to the Episcopal Seminary, the site of the Civic Museum, to admire it. The most enthusiastic of these was the writer Guy de Maupassant, who described the Venus as follows: "She is not woman as seen by a poet, an idealized woman, the divine or majestic woman, like the Venus de Milo, she is woman in her true form, in the form in which she is loved, in which she is desired, and in which one would like to embrace her".

The Landolina Venus is a 2nd century AD Roman copy of one of the many Hellenistic reworkings of the famous Aphrodite of Knidos by the sculptor Praxiteles. He was the first to show the goddess fully naked, shortly before the mid-4th century BC.

The colour effects, the contrast between the delicate moulding of the nude and the deep shadows of the cloak, billowing in the wind, suggest an island setting. Hellenistic features are the slight twist in the body, and the sensual emphasis in her chaste pose, associated with unbridled sexuality.

The dolphin shown alongside the goddess alludes to the fact Aphrodite was born from the sea foam.

The Greek original is attributed to a workshop in Rhodes or Asia Minor, and dates to the first half of the 2nd century BC, or the 1st century BC.

On the Temenite hill, and in Achradina, numerous ***pinakes*** have been found. These are small votive tablets bearing images of deceased persons who have been heroized. Originally they were placed in niches set into the rock walls of open-air places of worship. Dedicating *pinakes*, accompanied by small sacrifices, libations and votive offerings, *thysiai*, testifies to practices of ancestor worship, in which forebears are heroized by family descendants, in rock sanctuaries close to necropolises. The deceased is shown on horseback, setting out on a journey, or galloping. Horses and weapons are symbols of nobilty and heroic virtues, while the snake, depicted in some examples, highlights the funerary nature of the scene (fig. 55).

54

55

55. Votive tablet showing a heroized version of the deceased person

56

56. Marble statue of an old fisherman

57

57. Limestone Caryatid from the theatre at Syracuse

The luxury residences in the Borgata district must once have been adorned not just by pavement floors and colourful wall-paintings that had a great expressive impact, but also by statues. One such is the marble statue of the so-called old **fisherman** (fig. 56). found in the area of a Roman dwelling in 1930.

The model that this statue derives from has highly accentuated realistic features (the body bent over with age, the humble clothes, consisting in a loincloth around the hips, the loose, sagging skin and flaccid muscles, the basket of fish), and has a parallel in the so-called "Seneca the Fisherman" in the Vatican Museum. The fisherman's life is a very common theme in Hellenistic poetry (cf. Pseudo-Theocritus Idyll 21, or Epigram 20 by Leonidas of Tarentum, *Anth. Pal.*, VII, 295) and in sculpture of the period, which was fond of genre scenes.

Syracuse's theatre, constructed on the rocky slope of the Temenite hill, is the most illustrious and celebrated building for the purposes of entertainment in all of the western Greek world. It was used for the worship of cults, assemblies of the people, and public trials: it became one of the most significant symbols of the city's civic and religious history.

The existence of a theatre, designed by the architect Damokopos, is attested as far back as the 5th century BC, a time when Epicharmus' comedies and Aeschylus' tragedies were being staged.

The cavea that we can admire today is the result of renovation work by Hiero II, as evidenced by the names of members of the royal family and of gods carved into the sides of the diazoma, the corridor that divides the cavea into different sectors.

The upper part of the cavea was sacrificed to make room for an L-shaped portico to frame the sacred caves of the so-called nymphaeum. Higher up, on the magnificent Belvedere terrace, access to which is via steps carved into the rock, a portico was erected on three sides, with the temples of Ceres and Libera at the eastern end.

The Temenite complex creates an extraordinary union between the sacredness of the natural landscape and architectural stage design, and is an effective projection of the policy of dynastic self-representation.

The scene building of the Hellenistic construction was given a monumental facade consisting in several orders, with side extensions, and sculptures supporting the *logeion*, the raised stage standing above the orchestra level. Examples of these are the **Maenad-Caryatid** (fig. 57) and the Satyr-Telamon carved in local limestone, displayed in the centre of the space dedicated to the theatre.

This ornate colossal marble head of **Asclepius** (fig. 58) was discovered in 1804 in the Amphitheatre, near the steps leading to the upper corridor.

Despite long critical debate over the statue's interpretation and chronology, it is now certain that it is a copy, made in the Augustan period, of the statue of Asclepius made by the artist Phiromachos, a member of the Pergamene School of Hellenistic sculpture, who also worked on the great frieze of the Pergamon Altar.

It is also possible that, on the basis of analogies between the 'paternal' deities, the model was converted, given that the statue was intended for the great Hellenistic sanctuary to Zeus, behind which the amphitheatre was built.

58

58. Head of Asclepius, a copy of an original by the Hellenistic sculptor Phiromachos

59

59. One of the monumental lion's-head water-spouts from Euryalus fortress

60

60. Marble statue of man wearing a toga, from so-called Roman Gymnasium in Syracuse

The three monumental **water-spouts** (fig. 59). namely lion-headed protomes, were found in 1912, during excavations in the Euryalus fortress. They were unearthed below the large five-towered battery built in the phase when the defences were fortified in the early Hellenistic era. The fortress stood on the highest point of the Epipolae plateau area; the name seems to derive from the Greek term *euryelos*, "nail-head", apparently referring to its shape, like a tip. The huge fortification system, ordered by the tyrant Dionysius the Elder, was completed in just a few short years, between 402 and 397 BC, in response to the emergency posed by the threat from the Carthaginians, and as a spectacular demonstration of power. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus tells of the huge undertaking in terms of manpower, 60,000 men, and resources, 6,000 pairs of oxen, to turn the plans into a reality, in a building project in which the tyrant "personally oversaw construction work".

During the 1864 excavations in the area of the so-called Roman Gymnasium, **statues of Roman magistrates**, wearing their official togas, were found. Five are displayed in the Museum's entrance patio, but one, the most impressive and the only one which still has its head intact, is displayed in sector D. Datable to the early Hadrianic period, the sculpture (130-140 AD, fig. 60) was reworked in the first 20 years of the 4th century AD. At the man's feet we see the *scrinium* (box) for scrolls, with its rectangular lock and, below, the leather strap used as a handle.

61

61. Portrait bust of Vibia Sabina

In 1972, in Viale Cadorna, not far from the Museum, this white marble portrait bust of **Vibia Sabina** (fig. 61), the wife of Emperor Hadrian, was found. It is a fine work, and can be dated precisely, due to the presence of specific iconographic details, to the Empress' last stay in Rome, in the years 134-137 AD.

Syracuse's necropolises in the Hellenistic Period

Between the end of the 4th and the start of the 3rd centuries BC, the city's expansion into areas where earlier burial areas had stood led to the need to set aside new areas for funerary purposes.

The Il Fusco necropolis, lying outside the area affected by the new urban development, continued to be used, and was extended to the west, to the Canalicchio district, and into the Tor di Conte area. New sectors were activated in the Targia district, on the terrace of the Temenite hill, and in Grotticelli. Areas of smaller size were occupied in the Zappalà district, in what is now Via Zopiro, and in the San Giuliano district.

Among burial types attested in Syracuse's necropolises, the most common were rock-cut tombs, covered over either with earth or by stone slabs. Small round cavities, protected by a boulder on top, contained a cinerary urn, in the form of a krater, a large plain pot, or an open bowl, as well as the grave goods, when these were not placed inside the urn. "Cappuccina" tombs are present, overlaid with roof tiles in the form of a pitched roof, and, starting in the 3rd century BC, underground chambers to which access was via a shaft, and a single burial chamber, or several chambers. Alternatively, some underground tombs had a more complex plan, with chambers designed with imitation architectural details. But the most important new feature was the appearance of mausoleums, family tombs, or tombs belonging to civic and religious associations.

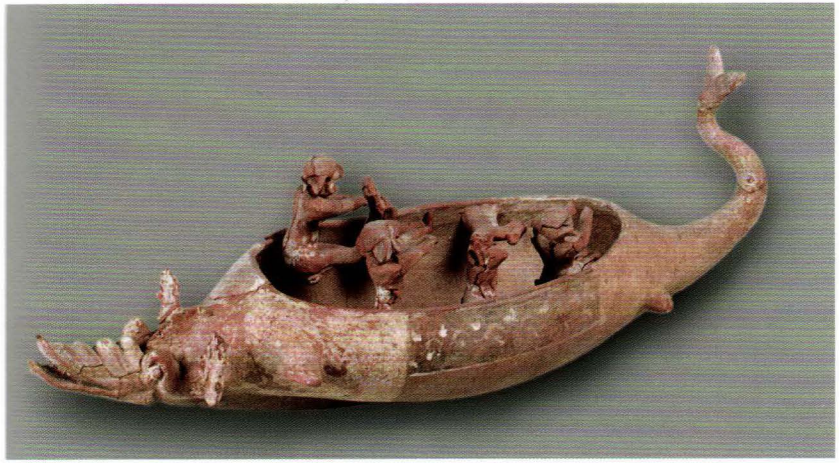
Inhumation rituals continued, but examples of primary cremation pit burials became more and more numerous. As of the 3rd century BC there are frequent secondary cremations, found inside terracotta, metal, or limestone urns.

Both inhumations and secondary cremation burials are found side-by-side inside the burial chambers.

The grave goods are often repetitive, comprising small items of pottery, mostly undecorated.

The grave goods in tomb 346 at the Tor di Conte necropolis, dated to the end of the 3rd century BC, included a **terracotta boat** (fig. 62) with the prow in the form of the head of a pistrix, a sea monster that had the head of a dragon, and the stern in the shape of a siren's tail. Five oarsmen with grotesque faces are seated on the benches inside. In a funerary context, models of boats, attested in eastern Sicily between the end of the 4th and the 3rd centuries BC, especially in children's burials, allude symbolically to the deceased's journey towards the Afterlife.

In the Grotticelli necropolis, during excavation work for the modern Hotel Panorama, this ***askos* in the form of a Satyr** (fig. 63) "sailing on a wineskin" was found. The Satyr wears a "pardalis", a leopard's skin which, knotted at the neck, expands behind to form the handle. The figure is reclining on a bloated wineskin, gripping its neck with his hands. He wears an ivy wreath, and his head is tilted up; his hair is flowing in unkempt locks. There are numerous similar examples in Alexandrine contexts, indicating that this vase type is of Egyptian origin. The vase dates to between the end of the 3rd and the early 2nd centuries BC.



62

63

62. Terracotta boat from grave goods in a tomb at the Hellenistic necropolis of Tor di Conte

63. Small vase showing a satyr floating on a wineskin, from the Grotticelli necropolis

Sector E

CENTRAL AND EASTERN SICILY IN THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PERIODS

Sector E is dedicated to some of the most important Hellenistic and Roman towns and cities in central and eastern Sicily. This part of the exhibition starts with finds from Centuripe, a Hellenized Native city, which achieved its greatest splendour between the reign of Hiero II and the Roman period: first as a free city exempt from taxes, and later as a privileged municipium under the Augustan system of organization. These are followed, in accordance with a strict topographical criterion, by material from the areas of Syracuse and Ragusa, from Catania and the area around Mt Etna, from the Messina territory, and, finally, from the cities of Morgantina and Assorus, in the district of Enna.

Although the portrait bust of **Augustus** (fig. 64), from Centuripe, from the "Augustales" building, depicts the Emperor in his mature years, being made just before he was named Pontifex Maximus in 12 BC, the face is that of a young man, in line with the canons of official portraiture at the time. All the facial features, the intense gaze with deep-set eyes, the slender nose, the thin, carefully shaped lips, and the neck turned slightly to the right, are elements indicating an attempt at psychological introspection. These features are also found in other portraits of Augustus in the last 20 years of the 1st century BC (Capitoline Museums, Vatican Library, British Museum), and the Centuripe Augustus is to be added to this list. The work was carved by a local workshop in the city, which developed a "type" that was staid and measured in its approach, having a strong expressive power, and a balance between the facial characteristics, making it a timeless and ageless piece.

According to a recent suggestion, all the stylistic ellements mentioned above are to be ascribed to the prototype used as the model for Augustus. However, the sculpture is instead to be seen as a good copy dating to the Hadrianic period, on account of the smooth, transparent appearance of the face, typical of 2nd century AD portraiture.

The **pair of Telamons** (fig. 65), made in polychrome terracotta, was found in Centuripe, in 1907, in a room in a sumptuous building on Monte Calvario, adorned with *opus signinum* pavement floors and wall-paintings. In the adjoining room another, similar pair was found, portraying two female figures serving as architectural supports (Caryatids): the decorative value of these figures was accentuated by the vivacious polychrome decoration, now almost entirely lost.

The "Syracuse-type" Telamons are given the appearance of satyrs wearing short skirts made of goatskins, the same form of attire worn by actors when playing this character in the theatre. The Caryatids are wearing a chiton girt below the breasts, with a V-shaped cleavage. Both statue pairs, shown with their arms bent above them to hold up a weight, were mould-made, consisting in two halves. In the case of the Caryatids, the division is below the chest, while the Telamons are divided at the hips. They would then be anchored to a vertical surface, perhaps a pilaster, by means of metal rods, with the two sections, the upper and lower parts, simply positioned one above the other.

64

64. Marble portrait from Centuripe

65

65. Pair of Telamons from Centuripe

The type is a repetition in private architecture of the sculpted figures of Telamons (and Caryatids) found in stage prosceniums, common in the Hellenistic period, from Ietas to Segesta, and Syracuse, in a genre in which the skill of Sicilian craftsmen stood out. They have been compared with the Telamons from the baths in the forum at Pompeii, dating to the time of Sulla. However, comparisons with similar types from local craft production in Syracuse lead us to prefer an earlier date, although still in the Hellenistic era, namely the 2nd century BC.

Bought by Paolo Orsi for the Museum on 17 November 1929, the **krater with lid in the shape of a bowl** (fig. 66) is one of the finest pieces from the Casino necropolis at Centuripe, which was active up until the 2nd-1st centuries BC. It was found by the owner of the land where the necropolis stands, during farmwork.

The vase is an example of Centuripe's output of polychrome, relief-decorated ceramics in the 2nd century BC. It is a wonderful example of local craft production, being part of the output of Italiot and Siceliot Hellenistic red-figure pottery, of a later date than the Lipari Painter.

Decorated only on the front with a genre scene depicting a marriage ceremony, it shows five polychrome figures painted on the pink background of the body of the vase. The central, female figure appears seated, and shown in profile. She wears rich draped clothing, while one of the Erotes flies above. On the lid a large head of Eros is painted, but the face is almost entirely lost.

The painted decoration, which is poorly preserved in its current state, and is often hard to interpret, was applied to the body of the vase after firing, after having given it a layer of lime wash, which acted as a sort of primer; all this was then allowed to dry, without a final firing that would have consolidated it. This instability was of little importance in antiquity, since they were valuable objects, but only for the brief duration of the funerary rites, and afterwards they would be consigned to the darkness of the tomb.

The area of Akrillai, a strategic Syracusan outpost on the "Via Selinuntina", located in the territory of Chiaramonte Gulfi, was the findspot of the precious glass **bottle** (fig. 67) with a hunting scene, part of the Melfi Collection.

Found in the necropolis in the Carbonaro district in 1890-91, it was in the keeping of Baron Corrado Melfi until 1920, the year when Paolo Orsi purchased the Ragusan aristocrat's entire collection for the Syracuse Museum.

The decoration, which is engraved using emery, with hatching creating the effect of shading around the figures, runs around the globular body of the vase. Set in a rural landscape, a man on horseback is galloping after two deer, that are also being chased by two dogs. Behind him, a young hunter aims his spear at a boar. In the background there appears a bear, or a wolf. A net is tied to a tree, and is stretched out in front of the deer. Above, preceded by a palm tree, runs an inscription in Greek in applied capital letters: "Lucky the man who lived piously".

The piece, made in the Rhineland area, dates to the second half of the 3rd-early 4th centuries AD.

66

66. Large krater with polychrome decoration typical of 2nd century BC Centuripe workshops

67

67. Glass bottle with hunting scene from Chiaramonte Gulfi

Akrai, a colony of Syracuse founded in 664 BC, modern-day Palazzolo Acreide, still has numerous monumental remains of the ancient city. However, they all date to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, with the sole exception of the fortification walls and the Temple of Aphrodite (Aphrodision), dating to the late archaic period. In the Hellenistic and Roman era, Akrai was the main city in the territory of Syracuse, having a theatre and a *bouleuterion* for meetings of the citizens' council.

From the Serra Palazzo district comes a **limestone bas-relief** (fig. 68), purchased on 23 September 1915, and dating to the 3rd century BC. There have been conflicting interpretations of the two figures that appear each side of the *omphalos*. According to the most convincing interpretation, the two figures are Apollo and Artemis, recognizable by the Delphic tripod, and by the *nebris*, the fawn skin that the clothed figure holds in her left hand, an attribute par excellence of the hunter goddess.

In the territory of Messina, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, a number of cities, including Halaesa, Aluntium and Tauromenion, achieved a high level of quality in their craft goods and their public monuments.

The Greek city of Tauromenion was built in 358 BC, by Andromachus, father of the historian Timaeus.

The Forum, the baths, the so-called naumachia, rich domus (private houses) and numerous epigraphs document the range of monuments, the public institutions, and the taxation system in the Hellenistic and Republican periods. The Theatre, second only to that of Syracuse in terms of size, dates to the era of Hiero, and was restructured up until the 3rd century AD.

In March 1917, at the Giardini-Naxos railway station, during work to expand the Provincial Road, the remains of a brick building came to light: according to Paolo Orsi, in the commercial suburb of Tauromenion a *statio* near the sea was established. Apparently it was a way-station first of all, later serving a postal function. The large **mosaic with Labyrinth** (fig. 69) may have belonged to the floor of the *tablinium* of the house.

Five large fragments of the mosaic, detached and relocated to the Museum, still show two crenellated towers, an entrance door and two dolphins, with buildings shown in an upturned perspective.

68

69

68. Limestone bas-relief showing Apollo and Artemis, from Akrai

69. A fragment of the labyrinth mosaic, from Tauromenion

70

70. Female bust from Morgantina

Morgantina. On Cittadella hill, the first traces of a settlement date to the prehistoric era, while a 13th century BC date is ascribed to the dwellings of the Morgetes, who probably gave their name to Morgantina. In the 6th century BC the city was inhabited by a group of Chalcidians, from Leontinoi and Katane.

The site, destroyed in 459 BC by the Sicels under Ducetius, was relocated to the Serra Orlando ridge, around the mid-5th century BC. The new city was laid out on the basis of a Greek-style, regular urban plan.

In the 3rd century BC, particularly during the reign of Hiero II, the city enjoyed a phase of great prosperity, as evidenced by the public buildings in the Agora, and by the lavish houses on the hills. It is clear there were close links with Syracuse, in the use of complex systems, for example in the well-decorated and well-organized thermal baths, in some very rich homes, the mosaic floors of which remain on the site. Most of the finds are displayed in the local museum.

In 211 BC, during the Second Punic War, Morgantina, the centre of anti-Roman actions in central Sicily, was conquered and destroyed by the Romans, who then handed it over to Hispanic mercenaries.

The material on display in Syracuse, deriving from excavations and acquisitions by Paolo Orsi, represents all the phases of life in the Hellenistic and Roman city. Terracotta finds are particularly numerous. Noteworthy examples of these are the female terracotta busts, found in large numbers, both in the larger Native sanctuaries and in the so-called "neighbourhood" sanctuaries. These are important evidence of devotional life, and together illustrate women's fashions in the 3rd century BC (fig. 70).

Elaborate necklaces and relief-decorated bracelets on the forearm, sometimes gilt, adorn the figure. Metal earrings may once have hung from the pierced earlobes. Indeed, there is evidence that earrings were produced in the city itself.

Sector F

SYRACUSE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA IN THE CHRISTIAN AND LATE ANTIQUE ERAS

Sector F displays the main artefacts, both Christian and Byzantine, from the city of Syracuse and the surrounding area. They cover the broad chronological period between 4th and the 8th centuries AD.

The space reserved for the Rotunda of Adelphia displays material from the Catacombs of San Giovanni, a magnificent collective cemetery, which was frequented and used from the 4th century to the first half of the 6th centuries AD.

The *fossores*, workmen in charge of digging and maintenance, created more than 5,000 burials here. The organization of the internal areas of the catacomb, which reuses a 5th century BC Greek aqueduct, reveals sophisticated technical skills: a long gallery, the *decumanus maximus*, divides the cemetery into two parts. One is the southern region, in which there are three rotundas, the Marina Rotunda, the Rotunda of Adelphia, and the rotunda of the sarcophagi (or of the seven virgins). The other is a northern region, traversed by a *decumanus minor*, in which there is just one large rotunda, the so-called Antioch Rotunda.

In the area surrounding the catacombs of San Giovanni there are small underground chambers, some of which are located within the grounds of Villa Landolina.

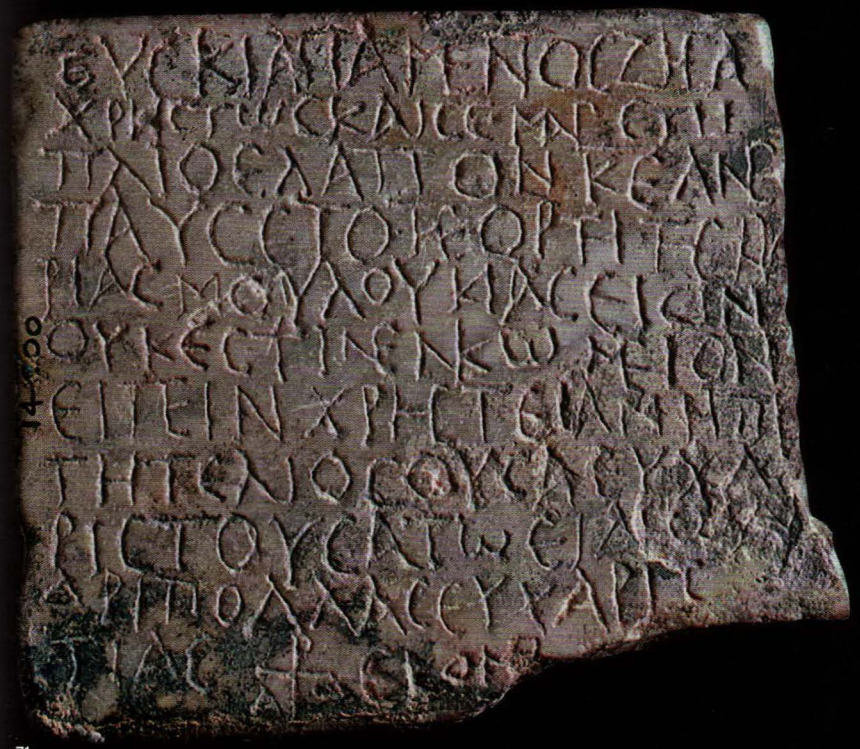
The exhibition display includes finds from the excavation of the Arangio I, II and III chamber tombs, one of the three nuclei identified in the grounds of Villa Landolina. Discovered in the second half of the 18th century, the underground chambers were investigated again in 1945 by the then Superintendent, Luigi Bernabò Brea, on land owned by the Arangio family. The structures, which extend from the western edge of the outer wall of the grounds to just below the palazzo adjacent to the Museum, were adapted from pre-existing Greek water cisterns, and used from the 1st to the 6th centuries AD.

Meanwhile, between Viale Teocrito and Via Augusto von Platen stands the Vigna Cassia underground burial complex, a huge cemetery consisting in five private underground Late Antique burial chambers, and three collective catacombs (the Cimitero Maggiore or San Diego Cemetery, Santa Maria di Gesù, and Marcia), dating to the 3rd-4th centuries AD.

The Catacombs of Santa Lucia, south-east of Vigna Cassia, lie below what is now Piazza Santa Lucia and, in part, beneath the 17th century Basilica and Sepolcro. They cover a timespan between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD. The catacombs also include a feature not frequent in Syracuse, namely sectors reserved for prominent burials that have been turned into areas of worship. One example of these is the oratory with a fresco of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, dated to the first half of the 8th century AD.

South of Piazza Santa Lucia, on the rocky cliff that ascends from Porto Piccolo to the Cappuccini monastery, there are several small underground tombs. These were already known of since the mid-18th century, and were the subject of repeated investigations by Paolo Orsi between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Compared to the larger complexes of San Giovanni, Vigna Cassia and Santa Lucia, the burials in these lesser underground funerary sites have



71

71. The Euskia inscription

different types of accompanying artefacts. The most common type of material found in them are lamps.

The exhibition also includes a display of related material from sites in the local area, where Christianity spread rapidly.

The Hyblaean area is especially rich in finds: for example at Sortino, where four necropolis groups have been identified, each corresponding to a separate settlement. The most lavish of these was the necropolis in the Lardia district, with isolated arcosolia (arched recesses), underground chambers, and pit graves.

The Museum's collections also include objects deriving from acquisitions and donations: among the most interesting finds are the bronze patens (dishes) for ritual hand-washing from Santa Lucia di Mendola (6th-7th centuries AD), and the African-made jug (early 5th century AD) from Piazza Armerina, with floral and animal motifs.

The Euskia inscription (fig. 71) is the most important Christian epigraphic text from Syracuse. Found in 1894 in the Catacomb of San Giovanni, it bears 11 lines of inscribed text, with the letters probably originally picked out in red:

"Euskia the irreproachable, who lived an honest and noble life of more or less twenty-five years, died on the feast day of my Lady Lucia, for whom no praise is sufficient. She was Christian, faithful, perfect, and well-pleasing to her husband by virtue of her many graces, and affable".

This is an important document attesting to worship of Santa Lucia, the patron saint of Syracuse, who was martyred in the city on 13 December 304, since as far back as the 5th century AD, the period indicated by the epigraphic characters and the Christological monogram visible at the bottom of the slab. The juxtaposition of the names is symbolic and significant: the deceased young woman Euskia (ie the Shadowy One) "died on the feast day of my Lady Lucia" (a name referring to Light).

A masterpiece of Late Antique art from Sicily, the **sarcophagus of Adelphia** (fig. 72) was discovered by Francesco Saverio Cavallari on 12 June 1872, in a burial dug into the ground in one of the three Rotundas in the southern part of the Catacomb of San Giovanni, the so-called Rotunda of Adelphia. It contained the skeletal remains of a single individual, laid over a thin slab of lead. The white marble sarcophagus consists in two pieces secured together internally by clamps. The relief figurative decoration with scenes from the Old and the New Testament only appears on the front; the two shorter ends and the reverse are undecorated, perhaps owing to the fact that the sarcophagus was originally placed within an arcosolium, or a niche.

The sarcophagus, datable to the later Constantinian period, or to the second quarter of the 4th century AD generally, belongs to the category of sarcophagi that have two tiers of decoration, with a portrait of the deceased enclosed within a central medallion. The lid, which is instead dated to the Theodosian period, seems to have been reused from elsewhere: this is suggested by the fact it is smaller than the sarcophagus itself, and by the repetition of the scene of the Adoration of the Magi, and the fact that a large quantity of bonding agent was used to fix it in place.

The lid shows scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary, taken from the Apocryphal Gospels.

72

72. The marble sarcophagus of Adelphia

The thirteen scenes taken from the Old and New Testaments are, from top left:

1. Adam and Eve forced to toil
2. Peter denies Jesus
3. Jesus healing the bleeding woman
4. Moses receiving the tablets of Law
5. Abraham sacrifices Isaac
6. The healing of the blind man
7. Feeding of the multitude
8. Raising of the son of the widow of Nain
9. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
10. Wedding at Cana
11. Adoration of the Magi
12. Original sin
13. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem

In the centre appears the inscription, carved and placed within a tabula ansata, with the letters reserved in the white of the marble itself against a red-painted background, in Latin, in three lines:

IC ADELFIA C F
POSITA CONPAR
BALERI COMITIS

(H)ic Adelfia c(larissima) f(emina) / posita conpar / Baleri comitis
"Here lies Adelfia, a highly illustrious woman, wife of Count Valerio".

The body of the sarcophagus has decoration carved in high relief in two ranks; the central shell contains the busts of the couple, Adelphia and Valerio.

There have been several different interpretations regarding who the *comes* Valerio, the husband of the deceased, may have been. One suggestion, now abandoned, was that he was a representative of the noble senatorial family, the Aradii, namely Lucius Valerius Aradius Proculus Populonius, who was the consularis Siciliae between 325 and 330 AD, perhaps the owner of the Piazza Armerina villa itself.

The most recent interpretation is that he was that *comes* Valerius to whom Augustine, in 419 AD, dedicated his treatise entitled *On Marriage and Concupiscence*: a man perhaps engaged in fighting, in Sicily, those heresies that clashed fiercely with Christianity, which was developing. This possibility is supported by the explicit iconography of the sarcophagus, which exalts the faith of the husband and wife.

The Arangio underground burial complex was the site of this **fresco** (fig. 73) whose date ranges between the end of the 3rd century and the mid-4th century AD. Within a fine purple-red border, we see the deceased reclining on a *kline* shown in semi-circular form (the *stibadium*): he wears a yellow garment, with long sleeves decorated in black bands on his wrists, and adorned with medallion motifs. As he dines, he is assisted by two slaves. The one on the right is restraining a large boar, pressing his knee into the animal's back. The other slave, in the middle of the scene, holds a tool in both hands, perhaps to cut something. In the background there appear large red poppies and three stylized birds.

The scene symbolizes the banquet in the celestial bliss which the deceased will enjoy in the afterlife. This is a clear allusion to the pagan custom of a feast being held by relatives of the deceased, in their desire to remember him without distress and affliction, at the time when he was preparing to achieve the state of eternal happiness in the next life.

73

73. Fresco from Arangio burial complex

A small **yellowish limestone slab** (fig. 74) is definitely one of the most interesting attestations of the Jewish presence in Syracuse, and dates to between the 4th and the 5th centuries AD. Discovered in 1900 in the San Giuliano ai Cappuccini underground cemetery, it bears the following inscription in five lines written in rubricated letters (namely painted red, originally), with a palm on the left, and a seven-armed candelabrum: "For future judgment, let no-one open here, for here lie Nopheios and Nyphe. Blessed the pious who do here lie".

The name Nopheios has been interpreted as the Syracusan variant of the Egyptian name Nouphios, confirming the network of relations that existed between Jews in Sicily and in Egypt, especially in Alexandria.

An important example of the new era of Byzantine painting in the Norman period is the **fragment of painted plaster** (fig. 75), depicting the face of a woman, tentatively identified as Santa Barbara.

Originally from the rock-cut context at Pantalica, where the Cave of the Crucifix must have been the religious centre of the Byzantine community located there in the north-east area, it was detached by Paolo Orsi and taken to Syracuse.

The saint is shown frontally with an oval face, and large, slightly elongated dark eyes. Strings of pearls can be seen in her copper-coloured hair, which is held in place by a veil that also covers the neck, from which two circular earrings emerge. The Byzantine canon is abided by in the shape of her large yellow halo, the use of purple for the clothing, indicating martyrdom and her serene acceptance of the will of God.

Another feature that is especially in keeping with Byzantine iconography is the rigidly frontal position of the saint, the outline clearly standing out from the background, her almost absent gaze, and her wide open but calm eyes.

The painting has been dated to some time between the later Norman period and the first half of the 13th century.

74. Inscription in honour of Nopheios and Nyphe

75. Fresco fragment with woman's face, from Pantalica

74

75

76

77

76. Lamp made of terra sigillata africana, from Bonaiuto burial complex

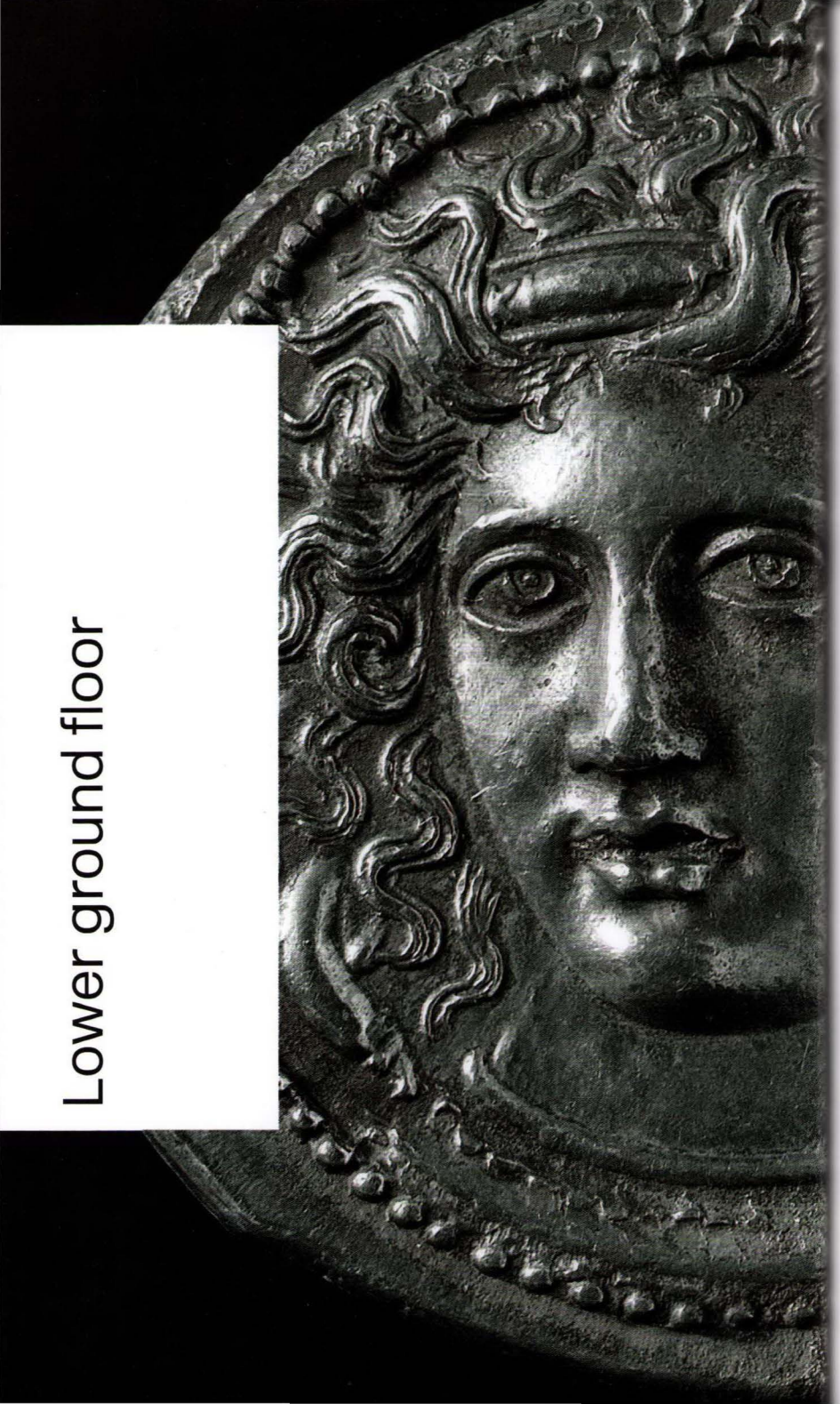
77. Bottle made of terra sigillata africana with relief decoration, from Piazza Armerina

Among the hundreds of **oil lamps** (fig. 76) found in the Bonaiuto burial complex, some examples are made of terra sigillata africana, decorated on the discus and shoulder, datable to between the 5th and 6th centuries AD.

This lamp has alternating circles, lozenges and triangles on the shoulder. On the discus there is a complex scene in which one can see the Ascension of Christ. The Redeemer, wearing a cloak, holds a cross in his left hand and an unidentified object in his right hand. He is borne aloft by two angels, who hold up the aura that envelops the figure of Christ.

In the lower part there are two apostles, in short tunics. One of them points to the main scene, his hand outstretched.

Regarded as a unique vessel of its kind, the **bottle from Piazza Armerina** (fig. 77), made of terra sigillata africana pottery, has been dated to the early 5th century AD, by comparing the decorative elements with those found on other vessel types. The body is decorated with vertical bands with animal and floral figures, separated by barbed ribbing, and a cross decorated with impressions on the neck.



Lower ground floor

Coin and Jewellery Collection

THE NUMISMATIC COLLECTION

The origins of the numismatic collections of the Archaeological Museum of Syracuse are intrinsically bound up with those of the city's older museum, with the coins that were part of the late 18th century collection displayed in the Archiepiscopal Seminary, and later in the 19th century Civic Museum.

Paolo Orsi's arrival in Syracuse, in September 1888, also led to an increase in the Syracuse Museum's coin collections, with coins from the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Norman and Swabian periods: every evening, while updating the inventory of the Museum's holdings, he recorded the new acquisitions.

Paolo Orsi's attention and skill when dealing with these types of finds ensured that special care was also given to how they were kept and conserved. Access was only allowed to scholars and prominent personages, whose visits were duly recorded in his notebooks. Such visits included those by King Vittorio Emanuele III, a knowledgeable amateur numismatist, and members of the royal family, who never failed to view the collection, and the Museum's holdings, every time they came to Syracuse, where they also signed the log-book reserved for important visitors.

Orsi's administrative work, and his conservation practices, which he pursued until 1929, also continued under his successors.

Under Luigi Bernabò Brea's directorship of the Superintendency, in the years of the Second World War, the coins were packed in crates and taken to Rome in 1943, under the auspices of the then Ministry of National Education. Later they were taken to the abbey of Monte Cassino, under the protection of the Prior, to save them from the perils of the war. They were finally returned to the Museum in 1947 by the Public Education Ministry.

In 1964, in a very short space of time, Bernabò Brea put the extraordinary Numismatic Cabinet on permanent display, with seven rooms open to visitors. The display cases allowed visitors to admire a number of important sets that had been recovered or acquired in the previous few years, and these considerably increased the holdings of the Syracuse Coin and Jewellery Collections.

Two important collections were added to these. The first, donated by the Marchesi Enrico and Maria Rosa Gagliardi at the end of the 1950s (in the form of a bequest, and with the full consent of their heirs, the Marchesi De Riso) and incorporated in the Coin and Jewellery Collection in 1972, comprises around 1,500 silver, bronze and gold coins, with the coin series of 19 mints in southern Italy, and 17 in Sicily. The second, from the Pennisi family, barons of Acireale, which Orsi had already judged to be the foremost collection in Sicily in terms of richness, and which had survived several vicissitudes and changed hands several times, was purchased by Sicily Region at the end of 1987, after negotiations lasting several years. First placed on view in the Museum's displays in 2010, it is famous for including some very rare pieces.

There is very rich documentation of the coins from the countless sites where the Syracuse Superintendency has intervened ever since Orsi's day, with regular excavation campaigns.

Having remained at its long-standing site in Piazza Duomo even after the Museum was moved into the modern building in the grounds of Villa

Landolina, after work lasting two years, the new Syracuse Coin and Jewellery Collection, finally reunited with the Museum which it originally belonged to, was opened on 22 April 2010, with the creation of a vault to ensure that the displays do not compromise the security of the extremely rich heritage artefacts.

Finally, in 2015, the Coin and Jewellery Collection was further improved with the installation of features designed to benefit disabled visitors, with a tactile map, features to aid the visually impaired, reproductions of coins from the most important mints with thermoformed panels, and a braille guide.

JEWELLERY

The Coin and Jewellery Collection also includes a rich collection of jewellery and items of personal adornment, although their excavation details are not always known. Many come from acquisitions or donations, or belonged to the oldest collections bought by the Museum.

Among those dating to the Greek period, the most common items of jewellery typically associated with women are earrings. These are of various kinds, dating especially to the Hellenistic period, and are from various locations in Sicily: a unique piece is the earring with a pendant in the form of an eagle, made using the granulation technique, while the earring with elix motif is worthy of note.

Roman jewellery is represented mainly by rings, including a wedding ring, with a *dextrarum iunctio* device in the setting. Meanwhile a moon-shaped pendant, closed at the ends by two lion's head protomes, was regarded as a talisman, and was thought to have the power to ward off evil. It was generally given to children, at birth.

The presence of the imperial court in Syracuse under Emperor Constans II (663-668) is evidenced by a hoard of jewellery and coins dating to Constans II, Constans IV, Heraclius and Tiberius (641-668), found in 1903 at Pantalica and later lost. Some of the items from this lost collection, now on display here, are a pendant with pearls and amethyst, part of a rosary crown, and probably a simple ring with a beaded edge and central, rhomboid bezel with a garnet.

Beautiful examples are the half-moon earrings with repoussé and tracery ornamentation, with filigree and granulation decoration, with animal motifs: made by jewellers from Constantinople and designed for high-ranking members of the court that was staying on the island with Constans II. A dominant decorative motif is the peacock, regarded as symbolizing the Resurrection, since according to legend its body was preserved from decay.

The final display case contains several pieces of modern jewellery – bought or received as gifts mainly by Paolo Orsi in his long career in Sicily – from various different provenances, and made in various different styles, such as two ivory bracelets with tracery decoration showing animals (the workmanship points to Sorrento or Malta), or a 19th century gold filigree set complete with diadem, bracelets, brooch, earrings and button-covers (cuff-links).

Tetradrachm from the Naxos mint (fig. 78) with Dionysus and kneeling silenus, 460-450 BC.

Obv/ head of Dionysus facing right, with long beard and ivy wreath, and wearing a beaded circlet.

Rev/ a kneeling silenus raises a *kantharos* to his lips (the most common type of drinking vessel, especially in archaic grave goods, with high, raised handles, like ears), propping himself up on the ground with his left arm in a sort of equilibrium that seems unstable. Around the figure runs the legend NAXION.

This coin-issue is regarded as one of the masterpieces of Siceliot coin art, both on account of the details of the rendering of Dionysus' head on the obverse, with his elaborate hairstyle in which the hair is gathered into a *krobylos* (a sort of knot, emerging from under the beaded circlet), and owing to the frontal view of the silenus. One can see the influence of the sculpture of the famous Pythagoras of Rhegion, a 5th century BC sculptor, and it is thought that the artist who engraved the die, the so-called "Master of the Severe Dionysus", created it to celebrate the refoundation of the polis of Naxos in 461 BC.

Ever since the earliest issues, coins from the Syracuse mint bear the face of the nymph Arethusa, the symbol of the city.

The examples from the final decades of the 5th century are true masterpieces. The artists who made the engravings, the "signature masters", are known to us from their signatures which, either abbreviated or complete, appear on numerous coin-issues: Euainetos, Kimon, Eukleidas. The finest include a **decadrachm from the Syracuse mint** (fig. 79), c. 390 BC, by Euainetos: the elegant hairstyle of Arethusa, with her hair encircled with reeds, refers to the river Ciane, which the nymph was connected to. Euainetos' Arethusa-type was very common, and became a reference model for both ancient and modern coins: at the Hunt Museum in Limerick, in Ireland, a Euainetos decadrachm from the Syracuse mint, set in gold, is believed to be one of the thirty coins given to Judas.

This extraordinary **frontal view of Arethusa from the Syracuse mint** (fig. 80), signed by Kimon, from the Ognina hoard, has become the symbol of the Coin and Jewellery Collection.

The flowing hair is bound at the top by a tenia, or diadem, on which the artist has placed his signature. She wears two necklaces around her neck, and has an earring with a pendant, visible in the left ear. One is struck by the rendering of the details, the way the pupils and pronounced iris are engraved, making the gaze expressive, and the use of relief for artistic effect, also suggesting colour. Outside the beaded circle, at the top, one reads the name ARETOSA, and to the left, within the circle, the two letters SΩ (seen by some scholars as an abbreviation of SOTEIRA = Saviour, an attribute given to the nymph in this instance).

The reverse has a quadriga (chariot) facing left, viewed from an angle, as it rounds the halfway point, with the charioteer crowned by a Nike, as he is intent on holding back the reins of the first three horses. Below the exergue line one reads the name of the artist, KIMON, with the grain-ear symbol below.

78

79

78. Tetradrachm from the Naxos mint

79. Decadrachm by Euainetos, from the Syracuse mint

80

81

80. Tetradrachm by Kimon, from the Syracuse mint

81. Augustalis of Frederick II, with the Emperor's portrait

Augustalis of Frederick II (fig. 81). After making peace in 1230 with Pope Gregory IX, who had earlier temporarily excommunicated him, after he had issued the so-called Constitutions of Melfi or Liber Augustalis, a legal code valid for the entire Kingdom of Sicily, Emperor Frederick II struck a new gold coin, called the "augustalis", at the Brindisi and Messina mints. This was to be a continuation of the Byzantine solidus, and a multiple of Arab tarì. Thus this highly prestigious coin was struck, and it circulated very widely in international markets. It continued to be minted up until 1250 and later.

The Augustalis is without doubt one of the most famous and finest coins from medieval Europe. The portrait of the emperor does not set out to be accurate as regards physiognomy, although the first issues bear some parallels with a portrait in the miniature on the first page of *De arte venandi cum avibus*, Frederick II's famous treatise on hunting.

Hoards are quantities of coins (or coins and precious objects, together) that, in times of danger, owing to wars or enemy invasions, were hidden by burying them. They reflect an important aspect of coin circulation in a given period, and provide essential information for dating and placing the coins that go to make them up, by means of the association of differing types from the same mint, or of coins from mints that were sometimes located in cities that could be far away. They also constitute the only source for detecting aspects of economic history, and sometimes of political history too (invasions and wars).

One of the most interesting hoards is the one found in the Serra Orlando district of the municipality of Aidone, namely in the area of the ancient city of Morgantina. This comprised 79 silver coins: it was contained in a lead marsupium, a kind of ancient money-pouch. The coins are **Roman victoriati from the Republican period** (fig. 82), from the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BC. Their name, which was the name already given to them in antiquity, derives from the symbol that appears on the reverse of the coin: a Victory crowning a trophy of weapons, a type reminiscent of coins from Syracuse from a century before, namely in the Agathocles period.

Two solid gold seal-rings (fig. 83) from Sant'Angelo Muxaro (Agrigento), bought in the public interest by Paolo Orsi in 1931.

In the central, elliptical setting, an example of repoussé technique, the first depicts a cow suckling a calf, standing between its mother's legs. The image, and the technique, are reminiscent of a famous gold cup, also from Sant'Angelo Muxaro, on display in the British Museum.

The second seal, larger than the first, is decorated with a wolf shown in profile, with its large jaws wide open and its tongue hanging out.

There is much debate over the attribution and provenance of the two rings. Several suggested interpretations seek to justify the persistence of motifs from the Aegean and Mycenean tradition. Some claim they were imported, or are of Native production, or were made by the Sicani/Sicels, or else are of western Siceliot make, or the work of immigrant craftsmen.

A recent study claims that the rings are the handiwork of a "Native craftsman" who, in the context of 7th century BC Gela, adopted various different influences, acting as a filter for them.

82

83

82. Hoard of silver coins, and bronze marsupium, from Serra Orlando

83. Solid gold rings from Sant'Angelo Muxaro

84

85

84. Gold earring with *elix* motif, from Syracuse

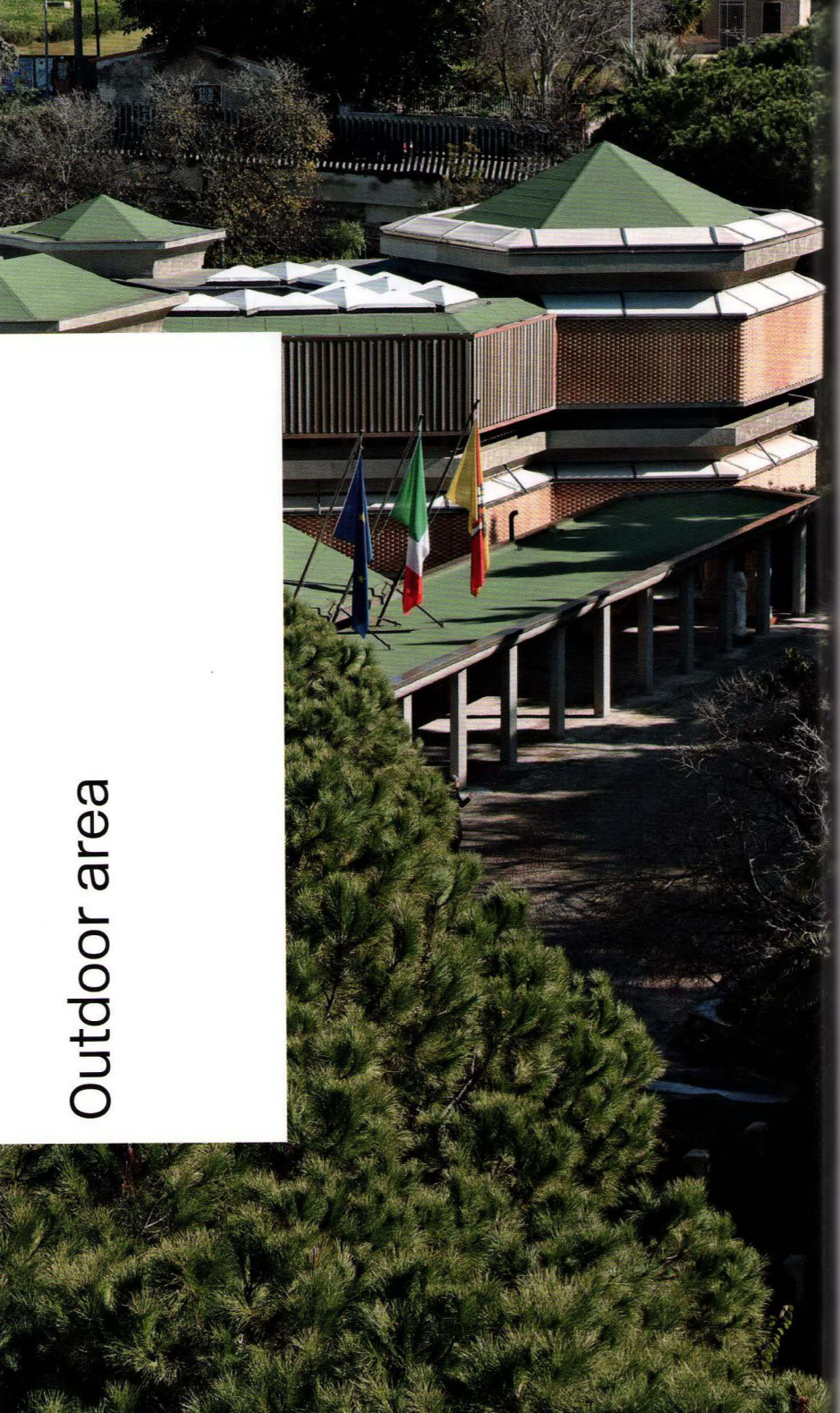
85. Gold earring, disc with pendants type, from Santa Maria di Niscemi

Earring with spiral or *elix* motif (fig. 84), purchased by Paolo Orsi in 1907, and found in Syracuse's Teracati district. This item of jewellery was made from a tubular rod, designed to go through the earlobe, and permanently closed by the ram's head protomes adorning the extremities.

In the Greek world this type of earring is documented in coinage, in votive terracottas, and in some vase-paintings: it must have been connected to some ceremony to mark a transitional moment in the life of the young girl who wore it, in all likelihood jewellery given as gifts to young women who, after puberty, were getting ready to marry.

Gold earring, of type with disc with pendants (fig. 85), found in Santa Maria di Niscemi (CL) and bought by Paolo Orsi in 1900.

The earring is distinctive, among the Hellenistic pieces in the Coin and Jewellery Collection, for its particular and highly detailed workmanship. It is hard to determine whether it was made by workshops in Syracuse. It has been dated to the first half of the 2nd century BC on the basis of the technique, and by comparison with examples held in the Museum of Taranto, the chronology of which is given by the grave goods that they were found with. In our case, there is no information from any excavation, or about the context in which it was found: the crown of Isis, which is found atop the disc, is usually not found before the mid-3rd century BC, and shows a connection with Alexandria, with which Syracuse had close relations.



Outdoor area

An open-air museum

The first of the two visitor itineraries is the archaeological itinerary: following a themed route, at various points along the way, one comes across artefacts made of stone, terracotta, and metal, datable to the Greek and Roman periods. In the case of some of these, the findspot has been identified, since they came from excavations, or were chance finds made in the past in or near the city centre of Syracuse.

The visitor route begins at the park entrance, on the western edge of the historic grounds, where, in the middle of a grassy area surrounded by trees, stands a group of *dolii* (large containers for foodstuffs) and terracotta amphoras, along with a number of millstones made of volcanic stone.

Continuing along the road that leads to the museum, one encounters three stone and marble altars. The marble altar, perhaps of Pentelic marble, found in Neapolis, in the area of the Greek theatre, is noteworthy.

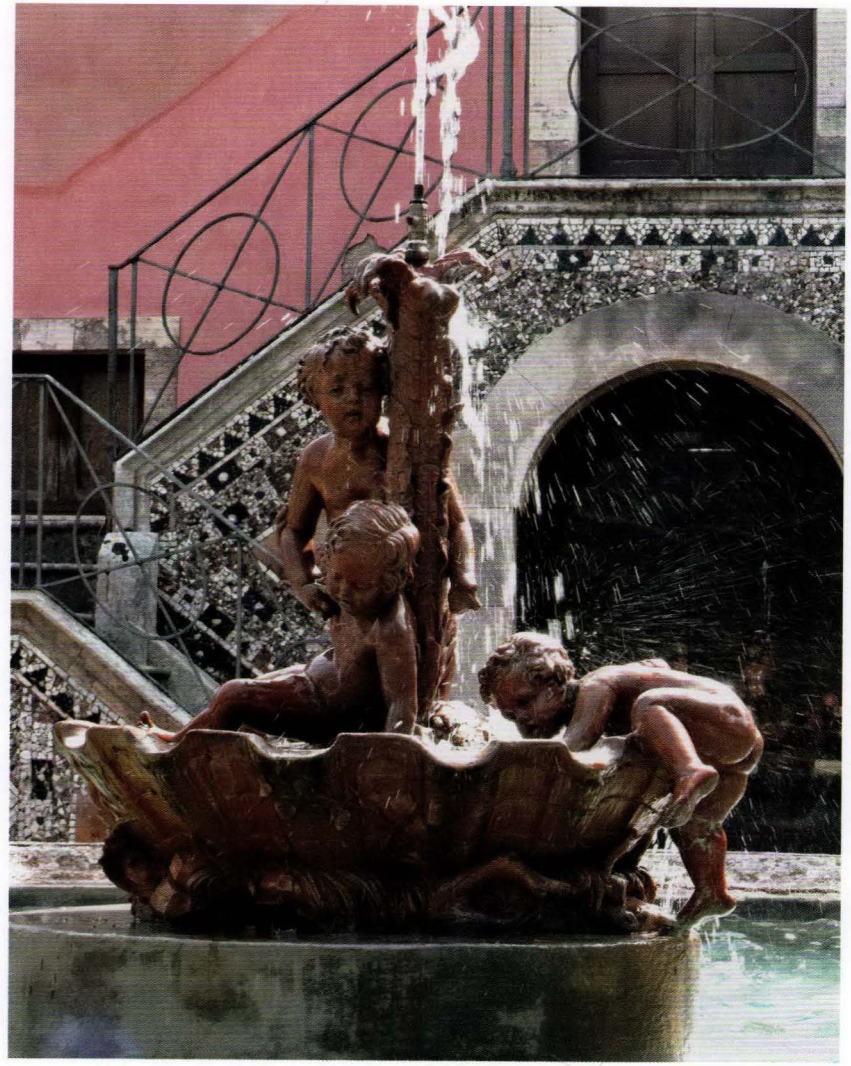
Beneath the long entrance portico of the museum stands a group of six marble statues of "figures wearing togas"; from there the visitor route continues up along the short stretch of road skirting the north-eastern side of the grounds.

At the top stands Villa Landolina, named, like the park, after the family that once owned it, and whose most celebrated member, Saverio, the Regal Custodian of Antiquities in Val Demone and Val di Noto between 1803 and 1814, was the man who discovered the statue of Venus that takes its name from him. Over time, the modern-day building has undergone numerous transformations. Once a simple rustic building with a well in the 18th century, it was renovated and expanded in several phases in the following century, while still the property of a Landolina (Mario, who continued his father's work in creating the non-Catholic cemetery). In 1894 the villa was bequeathed to the Interlandi Pizzuti family, who gave it its current appearance.

Dating to the beginning of this phase are the Caltagirone ceramic tiles made by Giuseppe Di Bartolo (1829-1897), lining the stairway leading up to the first floor of the building, while the large round fountain in the middle of the courtyard adjacent to the villa is adorned with a terracotta sculptural group made by a firm in Milan, Dall'Ara e C.

In 1961 the building was expropriated, along with the entire grounds, and shortly afterwards was renovated in order to be used as an accessory museum facility. Today it houses the Museum's library and archive, and other amenities.

Continuing along the long tree-lined avenue opposite the villa, that passes through the grounds, one comes across a selection of marble architectural elements (capitals, columns, bases and cornices). These are followed by the area devoted to underwater archaeology, with an iron anchor, its surface completely covered with marine incrustations, and a group of stone and lead anchors, some with inscriptions or decorations of various kinds. The visitor route ends with a series of stone sarcophagi.



Marble statues
In the entrance portico of the Museum, to the right and left, visitors are met by large, austere statues of magistrates wearing togas. The group on the right consists of five statues that were found, along with architectural fragments, during excavations carried out in 1864 in the area of the initial section of Via Elorina, just outside the perimeter of the city, in the area of the so-called Roman Gymnasium.
The one to the left, which, like the others, is missing the head, has a *capsa* beside the left foot. This is the round contaner with lid designed to keep the scrolls of laws, confirming the fact that the personage was indeed a magistrate. It was found in the area of the so-called Syracuse Forum, a zone that probably coincided with the Greek agora, which according to the description in Cicero we have to imagine was once magnificent, with porticos, and where the *bouleuterion* stood, the building used for meetings of the council of the polis, as well as a marvellous temple dedicated to Zeus by Hiero II, and a large sundial visible also from the sea.
Today in Piazza Marconi, previously called Piazza d'Armi, a plinth is visible with the bases of four columns unearthed during the investigations conducted by Cavallari in the 19th century.

The non-Catholic cemetery

The second visitor route focuses on a charming and romantic visit to the small cemetery reserved for non-Catholics that stands in the highest part of the grounds: this consists of ten or so funerary monuments, erected in the first forty years of the 19th century thanks to the generosity of the Landolina family.

The path towards the cemetery area winds its way along the rocky ridge below the park's perimeter wall, and leads to the first group of tombs located in a small belvedere. In the middle stands the funerary monument of Count August von Platen, a German aristocrat and man of letters who died in Syracuse in 1835 following a typhus infection, and who is definitely the most well-known figure among those buried in the park.

In the same clearing, built up against the outer wall, stands the original tomb of von Platen, erected just a year after his death wholly at the expense of Cav. Mario Landolina (it later fell into disrepair, leading to the construction of the new monument), along with other burials. These include a slightly unusual one shaped like a pyramid, with a marble bas-relief in the middle with a mourning female figure, erected in memory of a US officer, James S. Deblois, who died in 1806.

Proceeding along the path, we come to the second group of funerary monuments, the most eye-catching of which, in the form of a Doric temple, was built in honour of two American officers, Joseph Maxwell and Seth Cartee (*Carter*), who died in Sicily, like Deblois, in 1806, during operations connected with the First Barbary War. The then very young American nation took part in this conflict, in the Mediterranean, to combat the raids of corsairs from north Africa, protecting its own economic interests.

Photographic references
Museum Archive Photographic documentation
Germana Gallitto
Giuseppe Mineo

Front cover
Small vase for perfumes
or ointments in the shape
of a lion, from the
Giardino Spagna necropolis, detail

Back cover
The Landolina Venus

English translation
Gavin Williams for Scriptum, Rome

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